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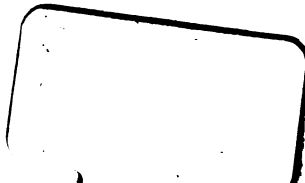
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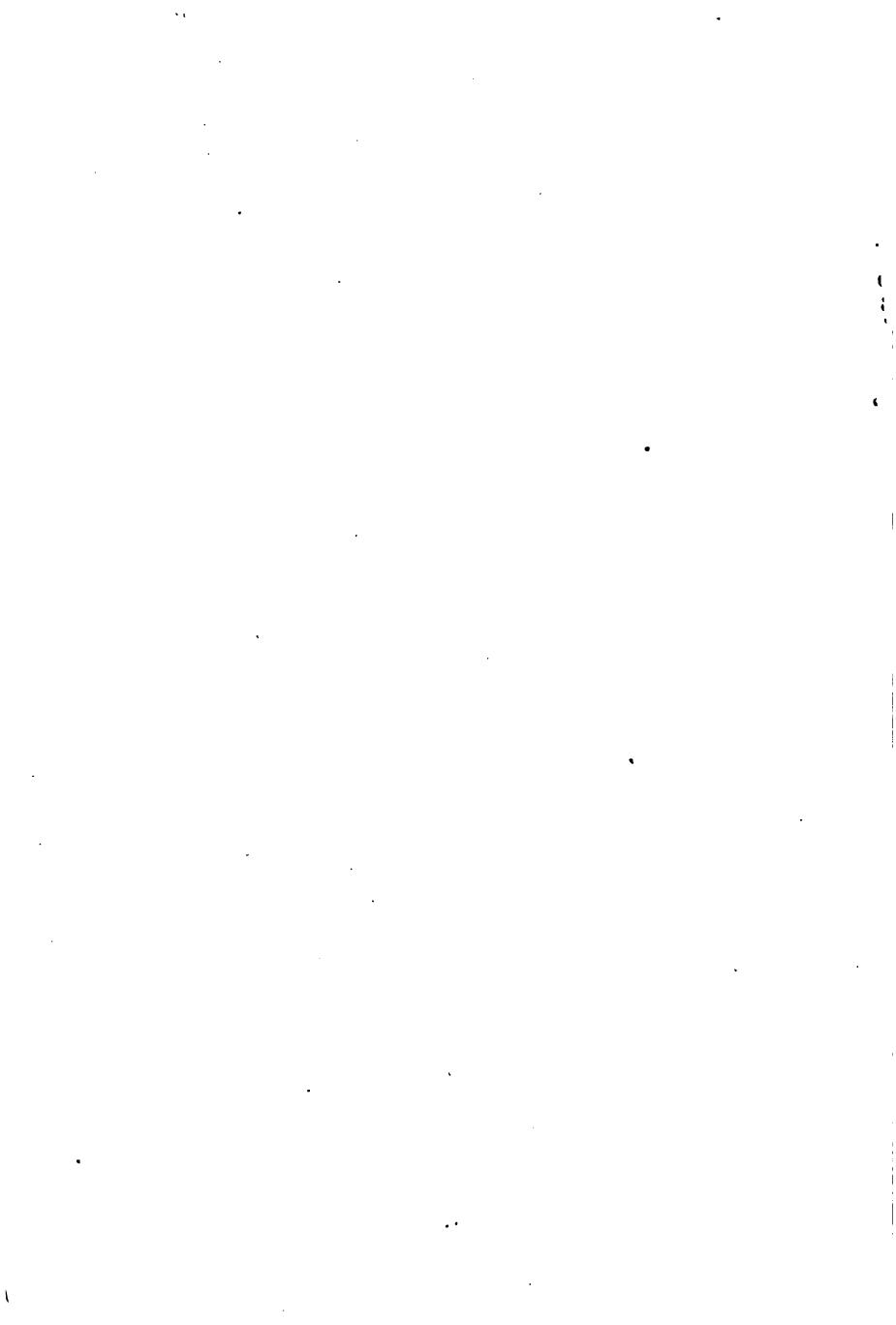
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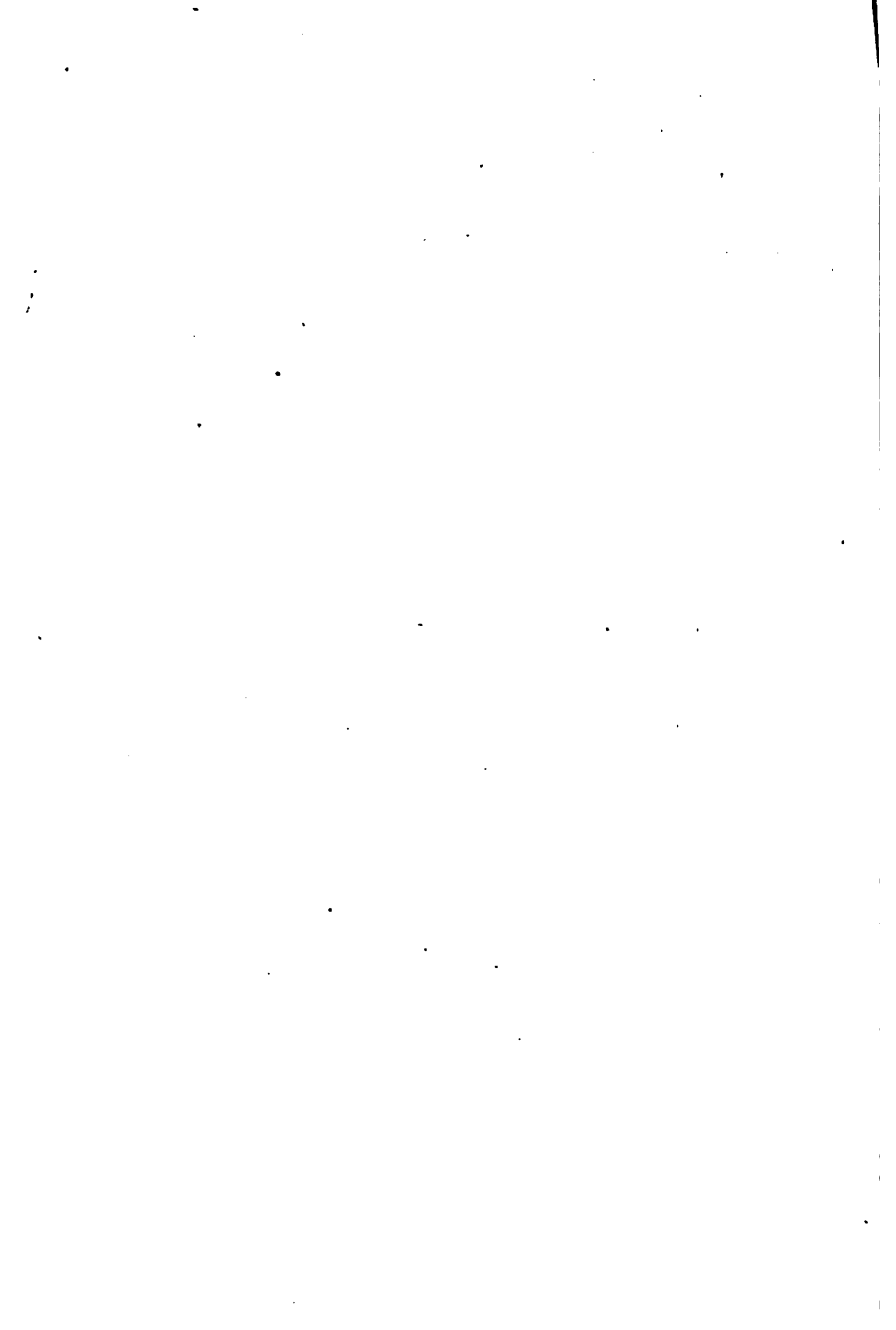
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BY

LOUIS BECKE

AUTHOR OF "THE EBBING OF THE TIDE," "WILD
LIFE IN SOUTHERN SEAS," ETC., ETC.

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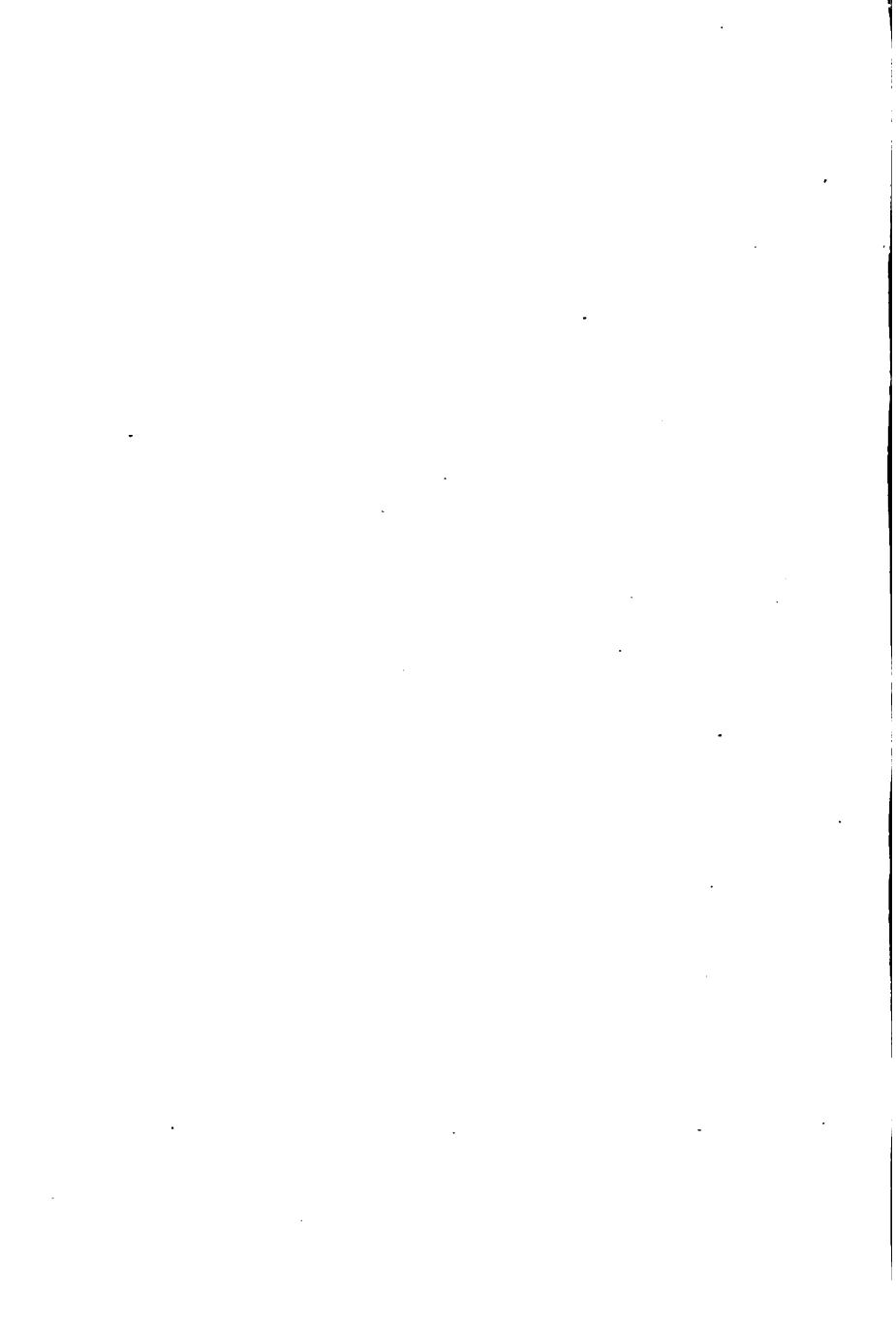
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TESSA



CHAPTER I

A SMALL, squat and dirty-looking trading steamer, with the name *Motutapu* painted in yellow letters on her bows and stern, lay at anchor off the native village of Utiroa on Drummond's Island in the Equatorial Pacific. She was about 800 tons burden, and her stained and rusty sides made her appear as if she had been out of port for two years instead of scarcely four months.

At this present moment four of her five boats were alongside, each one piled high over the gunwales with bags of copra, which the steam winch was hoisting in as quickly as possible, for night was drawing on and Captain Louis Hendry, who was then ashore, had given orders to the mate, a burly Yorkshireman named Oliver, to be ready to heave up at six o'clock.

Tessa

The day had been intensely hot and windless, the sea lay sweltering, leaden-hued and misty, and the smoke from the native houses in Utiroa village hung low down amid the groves of coco-palms which encompassed it on three sides.

On the after-deck of the steamer, under the awning, a man was lying on a bed of mats, with a water-bottle and a plate of bananas beside him. Seated cross-legged beside him was a native boy, about fifteen years of age, who kept fanning his master's face, and driving away the pestering flies. It was easy to see that the man was suffering from fever. His deeply-bronzed cheeks had yellowed and were thin and hollow, and his eyes dull and apathetic. He looked like a man of fifty, though he was in reality not more than thirty-two. Every now and then he drank, then lay back again with a groan of pain. Piled up on the skylight was a heap of rugs and blankets, for use when the violent chilling attack of ague would follow on the burning, bone-racking heat of fever.

Presently the mate, accompanied by the chief engineer, came aft. Both men were very hot and very dirty, and their faces were streaming

Tessa

with perspiration. They sat down on deck-chairs beside the sick man, called to the steward for a bottle of beer, and asked him how he felt.

Carr made a sudden effort and sat up. "D—— bad, Oliver! I have about six hundred and forty-nine pains all over me, and no two of them in the same place. I've swilled enough water to float a battleship; and, look here! you must give me some beer: a bottle—two bottles—a gallon—a cask! Beer I will have if I perish like a beast in the field. I can't drink water like that—it's as hot as——"

Morrison, the Scotch engineer, smiled. "Don't swear, Carr. Ye shall have just one long drink of beer. 'Twill do ye no great harm on such a roasting day as this."

The steward brought two bottles of lager beer, and Carr eagerly extended his thin, brown hand for the creamy, tempting liquid poured out for him by the mate. He drank it off and then laid down again.

"When are we getting out of this beastly hole, Oliver?" he asked.

"To night, I expect—that is, if the skipper comes aboard fairly sober. He doesn't often

Tessa

get too much grog aboard, but this island is one of the places where he is bound to get loaded up. The two traders ashore are countrymen of his, I believe, though they call themselves Britishers."

Carr nodded. "Dutchmen of some kind, eh?"

"Yes, like himself. He's a Dane, though if you told him so he'd get nasty over it."

"He's a nasty brute, anyway," said Carr wearily. "I don't like that shifty eye of his. And I think he's a bit of a sneak."

"You needn't *think* it; you can be sure of it. I'll prove it to you in a minute," said the mate. "Both he and that fat beast of a supercargo are a pair of sneaks, and they hate you like poison. What have you done to offend them?"

"Nothing that I know of. But I have always suspected that neither of them are too fond of me. Hendry I consider a low-lived scoundrel. I met his wife and daughters in Sydney a year ago—went to his house with him. They think he's a perfect saint, and at the time I thought so too, considering he's been in the

Tessa

island trade for ten years. But I know what he is pretty well by now. He's not fit to be married to a decent white woman and have children."

The mate assented. "You're right, Carr. He's a double-faced swab, and a thundering hypocrite as well. There's only one good point about him—he's a rattling good sailor man. As for Sam Chard, he's simply a drunken bully. I shall be glad to be quit of this hooker. I'm not a paragon of virtue, but this ship is a bit too rocky for me. Now I will show you what I meant just now when I said I'll prove that both Hendry and Chard are sneaks, and have their knives into you."

He disappeared below for a few seconds, and then returned carrying a letter-book.

"Now, Carr, my boy," he said, seating himself beside the sick trader again, "just cock your ears and listen. This is our esteemed super-cargo's letter-book. I had to go into his cabin yesterday to look for the list of ship's stores, and I saw this letter-book lying on his table, opened at this particular page. I caught your name, and took the liberty of reading the letter.

Tessa

It is addressed to the owners in Sydney, and is dated May 5, 1889."

"That was two days after you and the skipper and Chard had the row about those flash Samoan girls coming aboard at Vavau," put in Morrison, "and he and Chard started to knock the hands about."

"I remember," said Carr, as a grim smile flitted across his yellow face ; "go on, Oliver."

The mate began :—

" 'SS. *Motutapu*. NIAFU HARBOUR,

" VAVAU, TONGA ISLANDS,

" ' May 5, 1889.

" 'DEAR SIRs,—As the barque *Metaris* leaves to-day for Sydney, I take the opportunity of writing you to report progress of cruise of the *Motutapu* up to date.' "

Then followed an account of the various trading operations in which the steamer had been engaged from the time she left Sydney up to her arrival at the Friendly Islands. Then—

" 'In pursuance of your instructions, we called at Kabaira Bay, New Britain, to remove Mr. Harvey Carr from there to a more healthy location. We found Mr. Carr's station in a satisfactory state, and his accounts were correct. But both Captain Hendry and myself are of the

Tessa

opinion that Mr. Carr was on altogether too friendly terms with the manager of the German firm at Blanche Bay, and we believe that your firm's interest has greatly suffered thereby. He certainly was ill, but we do not think his illness has been caused by fever, of which we could see no traces, but by his availing himself of the too lavish hospitality of the manager of the German firm. He had also, I learnt, become very thick with the Wesleyan missionaries at Port Hunter, and seems to have been continually visiting them under the pretext of getting medical attendance from the Rev. Dr. Bowen, who, as you are well aware, is a determined opponent of your firm in New Britain, and has made several adverse reports upon our manner of trading with the natives to the commander of H.M. ships.'"

"What do you think of that?" inquired the engineer wrathfully, striking his clenched hand upon his knee; "and the fellow is a Scotsman, too."

Carr laughed. "Don't get angry, Morrison. He's one of the wrong sort of Scotsmen. Give me some beer. I'm a drunken beast, aren't I? Go on, Oliver."

"In fact Mr. Carr seems to have thoroughly ingratiated himself with the missionaries as well as with the Germans, and I think it is my duty to mention this to you at the earliest opportunity. I proposed to him that he should take charge of one of your stations in the New Hebrides, but he declined to remain in Melanesia, alleging that he is

Tessa

suffering from fever, and insisting on being given a station in the Caroline Islands. I pointed out to him that it would be to the firm's advantage for him to remain in the vicinity of New Britain, whereupon he was grossly insulting, and said that the firm could go to hell, that he studied his own health as much as anything. Furthermore, he made the direct statement that he was not anxious to continue in the service of a firm that resorted to shady and illegal practices, such as sly grog-selling, and other blackguardly things. These words he uttered to myself and Captain Hendry. On Sunday last, the 3rd inst., myself and the captain had occasion to exercise our authority over our native crew, who were making a noise on deck. Mr. Carr—who was violently excited from the effects of liquor—at once interfered and took the part of the crew, who not only threatened both myself and Captain Hendry with personal violence, but committed an assault on us. I consider that the firm will be wise to terminate their connection with Mr. Carr. His presence on board is a continual source of trouble, and I shall be glad to have authority from you to dismiss him. Captain Hendry bears me out in these statements, and herewith attaches his signature to mine.

“ I am, dear Sir,

“ Yours very obediently,

“ SAMUEL CHARD, supercargo.

“ LOUIS HENDRY, master.

“ Messrs. Hillingdon & McFreeland,

“ Sydney.”

“ What do you think of that, Carr ? ”

“ It doesn't astonish me, Oliver, for Chard, with all his seeming *bonhomie*, is as big a black-

Tessa

guard as Hendry. And there is a certain amount of truth in his letter—I did say that the firm of Hillingdon and McFreeland were guilty of shady and illegal practices, and that the High Commissioner in Fiji would bring them up with a round turn some day. But, as you know, all the rest is false—downright lies.”

The mate slapped him on the shoulder. “Lies! Of course they are! Now just listen to what I have written in my own private log.”

He stepped along to the deck-house, entered his cabin, and came back with the private log aforesaid.

“Here, listen to this:—

“‘VAVAU, TONGA ISLANDS, *May 3, 1889.*—This evening Captain Hendry and Mr. Chard, the supercargo, came on board at six o'clock, accompanied by several white men and a number of loose Samoan women. They were all more or less under the influence of drink. As is usual, our native crew were seated on the fore-hatch, holding their evening service, when Mr. Chard went for'ard, and with considerable foul language desired them to stop their damned psalm-singing. He then offered them two bottles of Hollands gin. The native seamen refused to accept the liquor, whereupon Mr. Chard struck one of them and

Tessa

knocked him down. Then Captain Hendry, who was much the worse for drink, came for'ard, and calling on me to follow and assist him, attacked the crew, who were very excited (but offered no violence), with an iron belaying-pin. He stunned three of them before the second mate, the chief engineer, and myself could restrain him, and he threatened to shoot what he called "the ringleaders of a mutiny." He had a revolver belted round his waist. The native crew then came aft and made a complaint to Mr. Harvey Carr, the trader, who was lying ill with fever in his berth. He came on deck, and speaking in Samoan to the crew and to the women who had been brought on board by Captain Hendry and the supercargo, urged the women to go on shore, as it was Sunday. This they at once did, and getting into a canoe, paddled away. Thereupon Captain Hendry, Mr. Sam Chard, and the white traders became very insulting to Mr. Carr, who, although he was so ill, kept his temper, until Mr. Chard called him a "missionary crawler." This expression made Mr. Carr lose control of himself, and he used very strong language to Captain Hendry and the supercargo upon the gross impropriety of their conduct. He certainly used expressions that he should not have employed, but under the circumstances, and bearing in mind the fact that the native crew were ready for mutiny, and that mutiny was only averted by Mr. Carr's influence over the native crew, I and my fellow officers, whose names are attached, desire to record the facts of the case.

"Then Captain Hendry and Mr. Sam Chard used very foul language to Mr. Carr, who again lost his temper and called the former a damned stock-fish eating Dutchman, who had no right to sail under British colours as an Englishman, and ought to be kicked off the deck of a British ship. He (Mr. Carr) then, being greatly excited,

Tessa

added that Captain Hendry, being a married man with a large family, was little better than a brute beast in his mode of life, else he would not have brought half a dozen native harlots on board—women whose very presence insulted even his native crew. Mr. Chard then advanced towards Mr. Carr in a threatening manner, whereupon the whole native crew, headed by a white stoker named Cleaver, rushed the after-deck, seized Captain Hendry and Mr. Chard, and threw them below into the saloon.

“Mr. Carr then addressed the crew in their own several languages, and explained to them the danger of laying hands upon the captain or an officer of the ship; also he explained to them his own position as a passenger. They listened to him quietly, and promised to follow his directions. At six o'clock Captain Hendry and Mr. Sam Chard came on deck, and in my presence and in that of the second officer and Felix Latour, the steward, apologised to Mr. Carr. Mr. Carr, who was very exhausted with fever, shook hands with them both, and the matter has ended. I have briefly entered these occurrences in the ship's log, which Captain Hendry refuses to sign. But this statement of mine is signed as follows :—

“‘JAMES OLIVER, *Chief Officer.*

“‘JOS. ATKINS, *Second Officer.*

“‘FELIX LATOUR, *Steward.*

“‘TOM CLEAVER, *Fireman.*’”

The trader held out his hand. “Thank you, Oliver. But I'm afraid that the firm of Hillingdon and McFreeland will be glad to get rid of a man like me. I'm not the sort of

Tessa

trader they want. I took service with them under the impression that they were straight people. They are not—they are simply unmitigated sweeps. Hillingdon, with his solemn, stone-jug-like face, I *know* to be a most infernal rogue. He fakes the firm's accounts to the detriment of the London people who are paying the piper, and who are really the firm. As for Sam Chard and this measly, sneaking, Danish skipper, they are merely minor thieves. But I didn't do so badly with them, did I, Oliver?"

The mate laughed loudly. "No, indeed. You settled them that time. But you must be careful. Hendry especially is a dangerous man. I believe that he wouldn't stick at murder if it could be done without any fear of detection. And he hates you like poison. Chard, too, is a scoundrel, but wouldn't do anything worse than he has done, which is bad enough, for the fat blackguard always keeps up the appearance of a jolly, good-natured fellow. But be careful of Hendry. Don't lean on the rail on a dark night when he's on deck. He'd give you a hoist overboard

Tessa

in a second if you gave him a chance and no one was about."

"I'll watch him, Oliver. And when I get better, I'll take it out of him. But I'm not going to let him and Chard drive me out of the ship. I am under a two years' engagement to this rascally firm, and have only three more months to put in. I'll settle in the Carolines, and start trading there on my own account. I'm sick of this filthy old tub."

"So is Morrison, and so am I," said the mate, as he rose to go for'ard again. "Hallo, here is the skipper coming at last."

A quarter of an hour later the captain's boat came alongside, and Hendry and his supercargo came aft under the awning, and with much solicitude asked Carr how he was feeling. He replied civilly to their inquiries, but excused himself when Chard asked him to have a small bottle of lager. They were accompanied by two respectable-looking white men, who were resident traders on Drummond's Island.

"I have some news for you, Mr. Carr," said the supercargo genially; "there's an old friend of yours here, a trader named Remington."

Tessa

Carr raised himself with an expression of pleasure lighting up in his worn, thin face. "Old Jack Remington! Where is he? I *shall* be glad to see him again."

"He'll be aboard here in another hour. He has a station at the north end of the island. The moment we mentioned your name he said he would come and see you. His daughter is going on to the Carolines with us, and he has just now gone off to his station to bring her on board, as the captain wants to get away at daylight in the morning." Then with a pleasant nod he moved his chair some little distance away, and began talking business with the two traders.

Carr, lying on his side with half-closed eyes, apparently was trying to sleep, in reality he was studying the supercargo's face. It was a handsome, "taking" sort of face, rather full and a bit coarse perhaps, deeply browned by tropic suns, and lit up by a pair of jet black eyes, which, when the possessor was in a good temper and laughed, seemed to dance in unison. Yet they were eyes that in a moment could narrow and show an ugly gleam, that boded ill for the

Tessa

object of their owner's resentment. His curly hair and beard were jet black also, save here and there where they were streaked with grey, and his figure, stout, but close and well-knit together, showed him to be a man of great strength and activity.

From the face of the supercargo Carr let his glance light upon the figure of Captain Louis Hendry, who was standing at the break of the poop talking to the chief mate. He was a small, slightly-built man of about fifty years of age, with regular features, and wore a flowing grey beard trimmed to a point. His eyes were those of the true Scandinavian, a bright steely blue, though at the present moment the whites were bloodshot and angry-looking. As he talked he kept stroking his beard, and directing sullen glances at the crew, who were still working hard at hoisting in the bags of copra. It was not a pleasant face to look at—a sullen ill-humour seemed to glower forth from under the bushy grey eyebrows, and vie with a nervous, sneaking apprehensiveness, as if he every moment feared to be struck from behind. That he was a bit of a dandy was very evident,

Tessa

for although his navy serge coat and cap were soiled and dirty, they were both heavily trimmed with gold lace—a most unusual adornment for the master of an island trading steamer. Like his supercargo, he carried a revolver at his side, and at this Carr looked with a contemptuous smile, for neither of the two traders, who actually lived on the island, thought it necessary to carry arms, though the natives of Taputeauea, as Drummond's Island was called, had a bad reputation.

An hour after sunset, and whilst supper was proceeding in the saloon, a smart whaleboat, manned by a crew of half-naked natives of Pleasant Island, came alongside, and an old white-haired man of past sixty stepped on deck. He was accompanied by a fair-skinned, dark-haired girl of about twenty. The boatswain conducted them aft to where Carr, now shaking with a violent attack of ague, was lying.

“My dear boy,” cried the old man, kneeling beside the trader, and looking into his face with intense sympathy. “I am so glad to meet you again, though sorry to see you so ill.”

Tessa

Carr, with chattering teeth, held out an icy-cold hand.

“How are you, Remington? And you, Tessa? I’ll be all right in another ten minutes, and then we can talk.”

Tessa Remington slipped down on the deck into a sitting posture beside him, and placed her soft, warm hand on his forehead.

“Don’t talk any more just now, Mr. Carr. There, let me tuck you in properly,” and she wrapped the rugs more closely around him. “I know exactly what to do, don’t I, father?”

CHAPTER II

FROM his boyhood Harvey Carr had been a wanderer among the islands of the Southern Seas. Before he was sixteen his father, who was owner and master of a Hobart Town whaleship, had perished at sea in one of the ship's boats after the loss of his vessel upon an uncharted reef in the South Pacific. And though another sixteen years had almost passed since that dreadful time of agony and hunger, and thirst and madness, when men looked at each other with a horrid meaning in their wolfish eyes, the boy had never forgotten his dying father's words, spoken to the lad when the grey shadow of the end had deepened upon the old seaman's rugged face—

“I'm done for, Harvey. Try to keep up the men's courage. Rain will fall before morning. I know it is coming, though I shall never

Tessa

feel it. Stick to your two little sisters, boy ; you must be their mainstay when I am gone. Lead a clean life, Harvey. You can do it if you think of your dead mother and of me. . . . And tell the men to stick steady to an east-south-east course. They'll feel fresh and strong when the rain comes. Drop me over the side the moment I'm gone, lad, won't you? Don't let any one of them touch me. Goodbye, my son."

Those awful days of horror had helped to strengthen Harvey Carr's natural resolution and steadfastness of purpose in life. When the famished and hideous-looking survivors of the crew of the *City of Hope* were picked up two days later the orphaned sailor lad made a vow to devote himself to his sisters and "live clean." And he had kept his vow, though for many years he had lived as trader, mate, or supercargo, among people and in places where loose living was customary with white men, and where any departure from the general practice was looked upon with either contemptuous pity or open scorn. Yet no one, not even the roughest and most dissolute beachcomber in the two Pacifics,

Tessa

would have dared to "chaff" Harvey Carr upon his eccentricity, for he had an unpleasant manner when aroused which meant danger to the man who was so wanting in judgment. Yet some men *had* "chaffed" him, and found out to their cost that they had picked upon the wrong sort of man; for if he was slow with his tongue he was quick with his hands, and knew how to use them in a manner which had given intense pleasure to numerous gentry who, in South Sea ports, delight to witness a "mill" in default of being able to take part in it themselves.

And so the years had slipped by with Harvey Carr, wandering from one island to another either as trader or seaman. Of such money as he made he sent the greater portion to his sisters in the Colonies, retaining only enough for himself to enable him to live decently. He was not an ascetic, he drank fairly with his rough companions, gambled occasionally in a moderate manner with them, swore when the exigences of seafaring life demanded it, but no one had ever heard his name coupled with that of a woman, white or brown, though he was essentially a favourite with the latter; for at the end of fifteen years'

Tessa

experience in the South Seas, from Easter Island to the far Bonins, he was one of the few white men who thoroughly understood the character and disposition of the various peoples among whom he had lived. Had he been a man of education his knowledge of native languages, thought and mode of life generally, might have brought him some money, fame, and distinction in the world beyond, but he took no thought of such things ; for to him the world beyond was an unknown quantity, only associated in his mind with his sisters, who had sometimes talked to him of their hopes and aspirations. They would, when he had made plenty of money, go to England, to France, to Italy. They would, with him, see the quaint old church on the sands of Devon where their mother, and her mother too, had been christened so long, long ago. And Harvey had only shaken his head and smiled. They, he said, might go, but he had no care for such things ; and he would work hard and make money for them until they married and wanted him no longer.

And then after a brief stay in the quiet little Australian country town where his sisters lived,

Tessa

he would again sail out to seek the ever-fleeting City of Fortune that has always tempted men like him into the South Seas, never to return to the world of civilisation, but with an intense, eager desire to leave it again as quickly as possible. To him the daily round of conventional existence, the visitings, the theatres, the church-goings, the talkings with well-dressed and highly cultured men and women, whose thoughts and life seemed to him to be deadly dull and uninteresting when contrasted with his own exciting life in the South Seas, palled upon and bored him to the verge of desperation. From his boyhood—from the time of his father's death he had moved among rough men—men who held their lives cheaply, but whose adventurous natures were akin to his own; men “who never had 'listed,” but who traded and sailed, and fought and died from bullet, or club, or deadly fever in the murderous Solomons or New Hebrides; men whose pioneering instinct and unrecorded daring has done so much for their country's flag and their country's prestige, but whose very names are forgotten by the time the quick-growing creeper and vine of

Tessa

the hot tropic jungle has hidden their graves from even the keen eye of the savage aboriginal. Go through a file of Australian newspapers from the year 1806 to the year 1900 and you will see how unknown Englishmen have died, and are dying, in those wild islands, and how as they die, by club, or spear, or bullet, or fever, how easily the young hot blood of other men of English race impels them to step into the vacant places. And it is well that it is so the wild wide world over, else would Britain be, not the mistress of the seas, but only a sharer of its sovereignty with France and Germany.

About five years previous to his entering the service of Hillingdon and McFreeland, Carr had been mate of a trading vessel whose cruising-grounds were that vast chain of islands known as the Caroline Group, in the North-West Pacific, and there he had made the acquaintance of old John Remington and his family, an acquaintance that in the course of two or three years had deepened into a sincere friendship. The old trader was a man of means, and owned, in addition to his numerous trading stations

Tessa

throughout the North Pacific, a very smart schooner, of which eventually Carr took command, and sailed her for him for a couple of years. Then Remington, who, old as he was, was of an eager, adventurous disposition, decided to seek new fields for his enterprise among the low-lying equatorial islands to the south, and Carr and he parted, the former resuming his wanderings among the wild and murderous peoples of New Britain and the Solomon Archipelago. Since then they had never met, though the young man had heard that Remington, accompanied by one or more of his children, had opened up a trading business in the Gilbert Islands.

Exhausted with the violence of the fit of ague, Carr had dropped off into a broken slumber, from which he did not awaken till eight bells were struck, and the steward came to ask him to try and eat a little. Chard, Hendry and the two traders were below in the saloon, drinking, smoking, and talking business ; Remington and his daughter, who had declined to join them at supper, were still on deck waiting for Carr to

Tessa

awaken ; Malua, Carr's native servant, still sat beside his master, from whom he was never long absent, and from the main deck came the murmur of voices from the native crew, who were lying on their mats enjoying the cool breath of the evening land breeze.

The moment the young trader opened his eyes Tessa's father came over to him and they began to talk.

"I was delighted beyond words to learn you were on board, Harvey," said the old man. "I didn't care about the idea of letting Tess go away under the care of strangers ; but now I shall know that she will be well looked after, and that she will be in Ponapé in less than a month."

Carr heard him in silence, then he said frankly, "And I shall be delighted too ; but, at the same time, I wish she were leaving you by any other ship than this. Cannot you keep her with you until one of the German ships come along ? Is it necessary she must go home by this steamer ?"

"Time is everything, Harvey. Her mother is ill, and wrote to me a few months ago, begging me, if I could not return myself, to at least try

Tessa

and send Tess home. The two other girls are married, as you know, and my two boys are both away—one is second mate on the *Facinta*, of New Bedford, and the other is in California. And I can't leave Drummond's Island for another four months or so. I have made a good business here and throughout the group, and to leave it now to the care of any one else would mean a heavy loss to me. Then, you see, this steamer will land Tess at home in less than a month. If she waits for one of the German ships to call she may have to wait three or four months. And her mother wants her badly."

Again Carr was silent. He knew that Mrs. Remington had always been more or less of an invalid for many years. She was a Portuguese of Macao, and though her three daughters and two sons were strong and robust, she had always struck him as being of a delicate physique—the very antithesis of her husband, whose fame as an athlete was known from one end of the Pacific to the other. Presently Carr sat up.

"Do you mind going away, Tessa, for a few minutes?" he said. "I want to talk to your father on some business matters."

Tessa

A vivid flush spread over Tessa's pale cheeks. "Oh, I'm so sorry, Harvey."

She rose and walked aft to where the mate was standing, and began to talk to him, her heart beating double quick time the while, for she had never forgotten Harvey Carr, though he had never spoken a word of love to her in the olden days when she was a girl of sixteen, and he was the master of her father's schooner.

And now, and now, she thought, they would be together for nearly a month. And what were the "business matters," she wondered, about which he wanted to speak to her father. Perhaps he was coming to them again! How hollow-cheeked, yellow, and dreadful he looked, except for his eyes, which were always kind and soft! She was nineteen, and was no longer the child she was three years ago, when, with her gun on her shoulder, she used to accompany Harvey Carr and her brothers out pigeon-shooting in the dark, silent mountain forest of Ponapé. And then, too, she knew she was beautiful; not so beautiful, perhaps, as her two sisters, Carmela and Librada, whom she had heard Harvey say were the handsomest girls he had ever seen. But

Tessa

yet—and again a pleasant flush tinged her pale cheeks—he had always liked to talk to her most, although she was only a girl of sixteen, just returned from school in California.

She sighed softly to herself, and then looking up suddenly saw the kindly-faced mate regarding her with a smile in his honest grey eyes, for she was answering his questions at random, and he guessed that her thoughts were with the sick trader.

As soon as she was out of hearing Carr spoke hurriedly, for he every moment expected to see either Chard or the captain appear on deck.

“Jack,” he said, speaking in the familiar manner borne out of their past comradeship, “you know that I would do anything for you, don’t you? But while I shall take good care of Tessa, I would rather she was going back home to Ponapé by any other ship than the *Motutapu*.”

“What is wrong with the ship, Harvey?”

“Nothing. But the captain and supercargo are a pair of unmitigated scoundrels. I have seen a good deal of them since I came on board at New Britain, and I hate the idea of Tessa

Tessa

even having to sit at the same table with them. If I were free of this cursed fever, I wouldn't mind a bit, for I could protect her. But I'm no better than a helpless cripple most of the time, and one or the other, or both, of these fellows are bound to insult her, especially if they begin drinking."

Old Remington put his hand on Carr's shoulder. "You're a good boy, Harvey, and I know what you say of Chard at least, is true. But have no fear for Tessa. She can take good care of herself at any time, and I have no fear for her. Just let me call her for a moment."

"Tessa," he called, "come here." Then speaking in Portuguese, he added, "Show Harvey what you have in the bosom of your dress."

The girl smiled a little wonderingly, and then putting her hand in the bosom of her yellow silk blouse, drew out a small Smith and Wesson revolver.

"Don't worry about Tessa, Harvey," added her father; "she has not travelled around the Pacific with me for nothing, and if either that rat-faced Danish skipper or the fat supercargo

Tessa

meddles with her, she will do what I would do. So have no fear. And she is as anxious as I am myself to get home to her mother."

Harvey was satisfied. "Perhaps I am doing these two fellows an injustice, Jack. When a man has fever he always takes a black view of everything. And then I should remember that Malua here, and the mate, and nearly all the crew, will see that Tessa is not interfered with. I am sorry, however, that I shall not be with Tessa all the way to Ponapé—I am going ashore at the Mortlocks. There is a good opening there——"

"Don't be in too much of a hurry, Harvey. Now, listen to me. Go on to Ponapé. Leave this employ, and come in with me again."

Harvey promised to think it over during the next few days; but the old man could see, to his regret, that the Mortlocks group of islands possessed a strong fascination for his young friend.

Remington remained on board for the night; and then at daylight he bade Tessa and Harvey farewell and went ashore, and half an hour later the steamer had left the island, and was heading north-west for the Carolines.

CHAPTER III

FIVE days out from Drummond's Island Carr had so much improved in health that he was able to take his seat at the saloon table for breakfast, much to the annoyance of Chard, who had been making the best of his time in trying to produce a favourable impression upon Tessa Remington. He pretended, however, to be delighted to see the trader mending so rapidly, and was most effusive in his congratulations; and Hendry, of course, followed suit. Harvey responded civilly enough, while Tessa, who had learned from the chief mate of the treacherous part they were playing towards her friend, could not repress a scornful curl of her lip as she listened to Chard's jocular admonition to Harvey, "to hurry up and put on some flesh, if only for the reputation of the cook of the *Motutapu*."

Tessa

Immediately after breakfast Carr went on deck again, and began to pace to and fro, enjoying the bright tropic sunshine and the cool breath of the trade wind. In a few minutes Tessa, accompanied by her native woman servant, appeared, followed by Chard and Captain Hendry.

“Won’t you come on the bridge, Miss Remington?” said Chard, “I’ll take a chair up for you.”

“No, thank you,” she replied, “I would rather sit here under the awning.”

The supercargo and Hendry went up on the bridge together, where they could talk freely. The man at the wheel was a thick-set, rather stupid-looking native from Niué (Savage Island), who took no notice of their remarks, or at least appeared not to do so. But Huka was not such a fool as he looked.

“*You’ll* stand little chance with her,” said Hendry presently, in his usual low but sneering tones as he tugged viciously at his beard.

The supercargo’s black eyes contracted, “Wait and see, before you talk. I tell you that I mean to make that girl marry me.”

Tessa

“*Marry* you !”

“Yes, marry me. The old man will leave her pretty well everything he has, and he has a lot. I’ve been making inquiries, and am quite satisfied.”

“How are you going to do it ?”

“Don’t know just yet. Must think it out. But I never yet knew the woman whom I could not work my own way with—by fair means or foul, as the penny novelists say.”

“It strikes me that she likes that damned fellow. Look round presently and see for yourself. She’s reading to him.”

“Bah ! That’s nothing. He used to sail one of the old man’s schooners, and of course they have a good deal to talk about. I’ll settle *him* as far as she is concerned. Wait till I get a chance to talk to her a bit,” and taking off his cap the supercargo passed his brawny hand through his curly hair with a smile of satisfaction. “She’ll be tired of talking to him before the day is out.”

“Where is he going to land ? Has he told you ?”

“Yes. He wants to be put ashore at the

Tessa

Mortlocks Islands. We have no trader there, and he has lived there before."

"I'd like to see him go over the side in some new canvas, with a couple of fire bars slung to his heels," snarled Hendry viciously.

"So would I," said Chard meditatively.

At four bells the wheel was relieved, and Huka the Niué native trotted off, and immediately sent a message to Carr's servant Malua to come for'ard. The boy did as requested, and remained away for about ten minutes. When he returned he seated himself as usual near his master. Hendry was in his cabin on deck, Chard was below in the trade room, and only Tessa, Harvey, and himself were on the after-deck.

"Master," he said in Fijian, to Harvey, "listen to what Huka, the man of Niué, has told me. The captain and the supercargo have been talking about thee and the lady." Then he repeated all that which Huka had heard.

"The infernal scoundrels!" Harvey could not help exclaiming. "But they won't get rid of me as easily as they think."

Tessa

“What is it, Harvey?” asked Tessa, anxiously bending forward to him.

The trader thought a moment or two before speaking. Then he decided to tell her what he had just heard.

She laughed contemptuously. “*His wife!* *His wife!*” she repeated scornfully. “If he knew what my father knows of him, and how I hate and despise him, he would not have said that. Does he think that because my mother was a Portuguese, I am no better than some native slave girl whom he could buy from her master?”

Harvey smiled gravely as he looked into her flashing eyes, and saw her clench her hands angrily. Then he said—

“He is a dangerous man though, Tessa. And now listen to me. When I came on board this steamer I intended to land at the Mortlocks Islands. But I think now that I will go on to Ponapé.”

“Do not change your plans, Harvey, on my account. I am not afraid of this man. He dare not insult me, for fear my father would hear of it.”

“I know him too well, Tessa. He and the

Tessa

skipper are, I fear, a pair of cunning, treacherous villains. And so I am going on to Ponapé. And I will stay there until your father returns. I daresay," he added with a smile, "that he will give me a berth as a trader somewhere."

A sudden joy illumined the girl's face. "I *am* so glad, Harvey. And mother, too, will be overjoyed to see you again; father has never ceased to talk about you since you left him. Oh, Harvey, we shall have all the old, old delightful days over again. But," she added artlessly, "there will be but you and I now to go fishing and shooting together. Carmela and her husband are living in the Ladrones, and Librada and her husband, though they are still on Ponapé, are ten miles away from mother and I. Then Jack is in California, and Ned is away on a whaling cruise."

A quick emotion stirred his bosom as he looked into her now joyous face. "I don't think you and I can go out shooting and fishing together, Tessa, as we did in what you call 'the old, old days.'"

"Can't we, Harvey?" she asked wonderingly. He shook his head, and then mused.

Tessa

“Tessa, I wish you could meet my sisters.”

She clasped her hands together. “Ah, so do I, Harvey. I should love to meet them. Do you think they would like me?”

“I am sure they would.”

They were silent for a while, the girl with her head bent and her long lashes hiding her eyes from him as she sat in the deck-chair, and he thinking of what his sisters would really say if he wrote and told them that he thought he had at last found a woman he would wish to make his wife.

“Tessa.”

“Yes, Harvey.”

She did not look at him, only bent her head still lower.

“*Tessa!*”

“Yes, Harvey.”

Her hands were trembling, and her courage was gone, for there was something in his voice that filled her with delight.

“Tessa,” he said, speaking softly, as he drew nearer to her, and tried to make her look at him; “do you know that you are a very beautiful woman?”

Tessa

"I am glad you think so, Harvey," she whispered. "You used to tell father that Carmela and Librada were the most beautiful women you had ever seen."

"So they were. But you are quite as beautiful. And, Tessa——"

"Yes, Harvey"—this in the faintest whisper.

"Could you care for me at all, Tessa? I do not mean as a friend. I am only a poor trader, but if I thought you could love me, I——"

She took a quick glance around the deck, and bent towards him. "I have always loved you, Harvey; always, always." Then she pressed her lips to his, and in another moment was gone.

Harvey, with a sense of elation in his heart, walked for'ard to where Morrison was standing in the waist.

"Why, man, ye look as if ye could take the best man aboard on for four rounds," said the engineer, with a smile.

"I do feel pretty fit, Morrison," laughed the trader; "have you anything to drink in your cabin?"

Tessa

“Some real Loch Dhu, *not* made in Sydney. Man, your eye is as bright as a boy’s.”

Just before eight bells were struck Chard came on deck. He was carefully dressed in shining, well-starched white duck, and his dark, coarsely-handsome face was aglow with satisfaction ; he meant to “rub it in” to Carr, and was only awaiting till Tessa Remington and Captain Hendry were present to hear him do it. He knew she would be on deck in a minute or so, and Hendry he could see was sitting at his cabin table with his chart before him. Harvey was strolling about on the main deck, smoking his first pipe for many weeks.

Presently Tessa appeared with her woman attendant. She, too, had dressed in white, and for the time had discarded the wide Panama hat she usually wore. Her face was radiant with happiness as she took the deck-chair which Chard brought, and disposed herself comfortably, book in hand. She had seen Harvey on the main deck, and knew she would at least have him with her for a few minutes before dinner.

Tessa

Hendry stepped out from his cabin.

“Ha, Miss Remington. You give an atmosphere of coolness to the whole ship. Mr. Chard, big as he is, is only a minor reflection of your dazzling whiteness.”

“Thank you, Captain Hendry. I am quite sure that my father will be astonished to learn that I have been paid so many compliments on board the *Motutapu*. Had he known that you and Mr. Chard were such flatterers he would not have let me come away.”

Neither Chard nor Hendry could detect the ring of mockery in her tones. They drew their chairs up near to that in which she was sitting and lit their cigars, and she, impatient for Harvey, talked and laughed with them, and wished them far away. Less than two hours before she had felt an intense hatred of them, now she had but a quiet contempt for both the handsome, “good-natured” supercargo and his sneaking, grey-bearded jackal.

Eight bells struck, and presently Carr ascended the poop deck, took in the little group on the starboard side of the skylight, and went over to his own lounge, beside which his

Tessa

watchful servant was seated. He knew that Tessa would be alone in a few minutes, and he was quite satisfied to wait till Chard and the Dane left her free.

He lay back in the lounge, and lazily conversed with Malua. Then Chard, who had been watching him keenly, rose from his seat.

“Pray excuse me for a few minutes, Miss Remington. Even *your* charming society must not make me forget business.”

He spoke so loudly that Carr could not fail to hear him, but he was quite prepared, and indeed had been on the alert.

Chard walked up to within a few feet of the trader.

“I want you to come below, Mr. Carr, and pick out your trade goods for the Mortlocks.”

Harvey leant back in his lounge. “I don’t think I shall require any goods for the Mortlocks Islands, Mr. Chard.”

“What do you mean?” and Chard’s face flushed with anger.

“I mean exactly what I say,” replied Carr nonchalantly. “I say that I shall not want any trade goods for the Mortlocks Islands. I have

Tessa

decided not to take another station from the firm of Hillingdon and McFreeland. I have had enough of them—and enough of you.”

Chard took a threatening step towards him.

“Stand back, Mr. Chard. I am not a man to be threatened.”

Something in his eyes warned the supercargo, whose temper, however, was rapidly taking possession of him.

“Very well, Mr. Carr,” he said sneeringly; “do I understand you to say that you refuse to continue your engagement with our firm?”

“I do refuse.”

“Then, by God, I’ll dump you ashore at the first island we sight. The firm will be glad to be rid of you.”

“I don’t doubt the latter part of your assertion; but their satisfaction will be nothing to equal mine,” he said with cutting irony. “But you’ll not ‘dump’ me ashore anywhere. I am going to land at Ponapé, and nowhere else.”

Again Chard took a step nearer, his face purpling with rage; and then, as Hendry came to his side with scowling eyes, Tessa

Tessa

quickly slipped past them, and stood near her lover.

“ You’ll land at Ponapé, will you ? ” sneered the supercargo, “ It’s lucky for you we are not in port now, for I’d kick you ashore right-away.”

The insult had the desired effect, for, weak as he was, Harvey sprang forward and struck Chard full upon the mouth, but almost at the same moment the captain, who had quietly possessed himself of a brass belaying-pin, dealt him a blow on the back of the neck which felled him to the deck, and then bending on one knee, he would have repeated the blow on Harvey’s upturned face, when Tessa sprang at him like a tigress, and struck him again and again on the temple with her revolver. He fell back, bleeding and half stunned.

“ You cowards—you pair of miserable curs ! ” she cried to Chard, who was standing with his handkerchief to his lips, glaring savagely at the prostrate figure of Harvey. “ Stand back,” and she covered him with her weapon, as he made a step towards her, “ stand back, or I will shoot you dead.” Then as the second mate,

Tessa

Huka, and another native appeared on the poop, she sank on her knees beside Harvey, and called for water.

Hendry, whose face was streaming with blood, though he was but little hurt, rose to his feet and addressed the second mate.

“Mr. Atkins, put that man in irons,” and he pointed to Harvey, who was now sitting up, with Tessa holding a glass of water to his lips.

The second mate eyed his captain sullenly. “He is scarcely conscious yet, sir.”

“Do you refuse to obey me? Quick, answer me. Where is the mate? Mr. Chard, I call on you to support my authority.”

Harvey looked at the second mate, whose features were working curiously. He rose and pressed Tessa's hand.

“You must obey him, Atkins,” he said. “If you don't he'll break you. He's a spiteful hound.”

Atkins, with a sorrowful face, went to his cabin and returned with a pair of handcuffs, just as the chief officer appeared. As he stepped on the poop he was followed by half

Tessa

a dozen of the native crew, who advanced towards Hendry and the supercargo with threatening glances.

“Go for’ard, you swine!” shouted Chard, who saw that they meant a rescue. He darted into Hendry’s cabin, and reappeared with the captain’s revolvers, one of which he handed to him.

Harvey looked contemptuously at the supercargo, then turning to the natives he spoke to them in Samoan, and earnestly besought them to go for’ard, telling them of the penalties they would suffer if they disputed the captain’s authority. They obeyed him with reluctance, and left the poop. Then he held out his hands to the second mate, who snapped the handcuffs on his wrists.

“Take him to the for’ard deck-house,” snarled Hendry viciously.

“I protest against this, sir,” said Oliver respectfully. “I beg of you to beware of what you are doing.”

Hendry gave him a furious glance, but his rage choked his utterance.

Tessa Remington followed the prisoner to

Tessa

the break of the poop and whispered to him ere he descended the ladder. He nodded and smiled. Then she turned and faced Chard and the captain.

“Perhaps you would like to put me in irons too, gentlemen,” she said mockingly. “I am not very strong, though stronger than Mr. Carr has been for many months.”

The captain eyed her with sudden malevolence ; Chard, bully as he was, with a secret admiration as she stood before them, still holding her revolver in her hand. She faced them in an attitude of defiance for a second or two, and then with a scornful laugh swept by them and went below to her cabin.

CHAPTER IV

AT six o'clock that evening the *Motutapu* was plunging into a heavy head sea, for the wind had suddenly hauled round to the north-east and raised a mountainous swell. Chard and his jackal were seated in the latter's cabin on deck. A half-emptied bottle of brandy was on the table, and both men's faces were flushed with drink, for this was the second bottle since noon. Hendry did not present a pleasant appearance, for Tessa's pistol had cut deeply into his thin, tough face, which was liberally adorned with strips of plaster. The liquor he had taken had also turned his naturally red face into a purple hue, and his steely blue eyes seemed to have dilated to twice their size, as he listened with venomous interest to Chard.

"Now, look here, Louis," said the latter,

Tessa

“both you and I want to get even with him, don't we?”

It was only when the supercargo was planning some especial piece of villainy that he addressed his *confrère* by his Christian name. Secretly he despised him as a “damned Dutchman,” to his face he flattered him; for he was a useful and willing tool, and during the three or four years they had sailed together had materially assisted the “good-natured, jovial” supercargo in his course of steady speculation. Yet neither trusted the other.

“You bet I do,” replied Hendry; “but I'd like to get even with that spiteful little half-bred Portuguese devil——”

“Steady, Louis, steady,” said Chard, with a half-drunken leer; “you must remember that she is to be Mrs. Samuel Chard.”

“Don't think you have the ghost of a chance, as I said before. She's in love with that fellow.”

“Then she must get out of love with him. I tell you, Louis”—here he struck his fist on the table—“that I mean to make her marry me. And she'll be *glad* to marry me before we get

Tessa

to Ponapé. And if you stick to me and help to pull me through, it's a hundred quid for you."

"How are you going to do it?" and the captain bent forward his foxy face and grinned in anticipation.

"Same old way as with that Raratongan girl last year. She'll go to sleep after supper, and I can open any door in the saloon, as *you* know, don't you, old man?" and he laughed coarsely. "Dear, dear, what times we have had together, Louis, my esteemed churchwarden of Darling Point, Sydney!"

The Dane tugged at his beard, and then poured out some brandy for himself and his fellow scoundrel. "We have, we have, Sam," he said, uneasily. "But what about the native woman who sleeps with her?"

"The native woman, when *she* awakes, my Christian friend, will find herself in the trade-room in the company of Mr. Tim Donnelly, one of the firemen. And Mr. Tim Donnelly, to whom I have given two sovereigns, will bear me out, if necessary, that 'the woman tempted him, and he did fall.' Also he will be prepared

Tessa

to swear that this native woman, Maoni, told him that her mistress expected a visit from Mr. Chard, and had asked her to be out of the way."

"Well, after that."

"After that, my dear Christian friend, with the rudely executed diagrams in sticking-plaster on the facial cuticle, my pious churchwarden with the large family of interesting girls—after that, Miss Tessa Remington will be glad to marry Mr. Samuel Chard, inasmuch as when *she* awakes it will be under the same improper conditions as those of the dissolute Tim Donnelly and the flighty Miss Maoni; for the beauteous Tessa will be fortuitously discovered by Captain Louis Hendry and several other persons on board, in such circumstances that an immediate marriage of the indiscreet lovers by one of the American missionaries at Ponapé will present the only solution of what would otherwise be a 'terrible scandal.'"

"And what will you do with this fellow Carr?"

"Chuck him ashore at the Mortlocks," replied Chard with an oath; "we'll be there in

Tessa

a couple of days, and I'll kick him over the side if he turns rusty. Hillingdon doesn't like him, so we are quite safe."

"When is the love-making to come off?" asked Hendry, with a fiend-like grin.

"As soon as we are clear of Carr—or sooner; to-night maybe. We must log it that he was continually trying to cause the native crew to mutiny, and that for the safety of the ship we got rid of him. Hillingdon will back us up."

Tessa did not appear at supper. She kept to her cabin with Maoni, her dear Maoni, who, though but little older than herself, was as a mother to her; for the native girl had been brought up with her and her sisters from their infancy. And as Tessa lay back with her dark head pillowed against the bosom of the native girl, and sobbed as she thought of her lover lying in the deck-house with the handcuffs on his wrists, Maoni pressed her lips to those of her mistress.

"Lie there, little one, lay thy head on my bosom," she said; "'tis a bad day for thee, but yet all will be well soon. These sailor men with

Tessa

the brown skins will not let thy lover be hurt. That much do I know already. Speak but one word, and the captain and the big fat man with the black eyes will be dead men."

Tessa smiled through her tears. "Nay, Maoni, that must not be ; I desire no man's death. But yet if he be not set free to-morrow trouble will come of it, for he hath done nothing wrong ; and the brown men, as thou sayest, have a strong friendship for him."

"He shall be set free to-morrow," said Maoni, with quiet emphasis. "The brown sailor men have talked together over this thing, and they say that they are ready at thy word to make captive the captain, the big fat man, and all those white men who tend the great fires in the belly of the ship."

Tessa knew that the half-dozen of white firemen and stokers were on bad terms with the native crew. They were a ruffianly, drunken set of scoundrels, and their leader, a powerfully built man named Donnelly, had grossly insulted both the first and second mates. He was an especial *protégé* of the supercargo, who, as well as the captain, secretly encouraged him and his

Tessa

fellows to annoy and exasperate the two officers and the chief engineer.

They remained in their cabin talking together in low tones and without a light till they heard eight bells strike ; and ten minutes afterwards, just as they were going on deck, some one tapped at the cabin door.

“It is me, Miss Remington,” said the voice of Oliver ; “please let me come in for a moment. Be quick, please, as I don’t want the captain to know I am here.”

Tessa at once opened the door. “Come in Mr. Oliver. But we have no light.”

“Never mind that, miss,” he said in a low voice, carefully closing the door and then bolting it, “I cannot stay long. I came to warn you that there is likely to be trouble to-night about Mr. Carr, and you had better not come on deck. Keep to your cabin, and don’t open your door to any one except myself, the second mate, or the steward. The native crew are in a dangerous state of excitement, and I am sure they will attempt to liberate Mr. Carr before morning. Both the captain and Chard are more than half-drunk ; and the chief engineer

Tessa

tells me that for some reason they have given liquor to the firemen and stokers, who have set him at defiance. I fear, I fear greatly, miss, that some calamity may occur on board this ship to-night. Therefore I beg of you to keep to your cabin."

"Thank you very much, Mr. Oliver. We certainly did intend to go on deck and remain some hours, but shall not do so now. But tell me, please, have you seen Mr. Carr? Is he well?"

"Quite well. I saw him a few minutes ago, and he bade me tell you to have no fear for him. I am now again going to Captain Hendry to ask him, for his own and the ship's safety, to set Mr. Carr free. If he refuses I cannot say what will happen."

Tessa put her little hand upon the mate's huge, rough paw, and looked into his honest, troubled eyes through the darkness.

"It is good of you," she whispered. "Oh, do try, Mr. Oliver, try your best to make the captain set him at liberty."

"Indeed I will, miss," replied the mate earnestly, as he pressed her hand, and went softly out into the main cabin. He stood by

Tessa

the table for a minute or two, thinking with wrinkled brow of the best way to approach the captain and bring him to reason. Presently he sat down, took his pipe from his pocket, filled it, and began to smoke.

A heavy step sounded on the companion steps, and Chard descended somewhat unsteadily, and calling for the second steward—who was in the pantry—to come to him, brushed past the chief officer, and went into his own cabin.

The second steward—a dirty, evil-faced little cockney named Jessop, whom Oliver and his fellow officers particularly abhorred—at once followed the supercargo in to his cabin, which was immediately closed. In less than five minutes it opened again, and Jessop came out and returned to the pantry, and presently Oliver heard the rattle of cups and saucers as the man made preparations for the coffee which was always served to Hendry, Chard, Carr, and Tessa and her attendant, and the officer on watch at nine o'clock every evening.

“Would you like a cup of coffee, sir, as you have not turned in?”

Tessa

It was Jessop who was speaking, and Oliver looked up in some wonder, for the man knew that he disliked him, and indeed he (Oliver) had once smartly cuffed him for creating a disturbance for'ard with the native crew.

Most fortunately for himself, Oliver did not want any coffee, so merely giving the man a gruff "No, thank you," he rose and went on deck.

The moment he was out of the cabin Chard appeared, and looked inquiringly at the second steward.

"'E won't 'ave any, blarst him!" said the man, speaking in a whisper, for Latour, the chief steward, was in his cabin, which was abreast the trade-room.

Chard uttered a curse. "Never mind him, then. Sling it out of the port or you'll be giving it to me instead perhaps. Are the other two cups ready?"

The man nodded. "All ready, but it's a bit early yet."

"That doesn't matter. Pour it out and take it to them—the sooner the better."

Chard, whose dark face was deeply flushed,

Tessa

sat down at the table, lit a cigar, and watched his villainous accomplice place the two cups of coffee with some biscuits on a tray, take it to Miss Remington's door and knock.

“Coffee, ma'am.”

“Thank you, steward,” he heard Tessa's soft voice reply as Maoni opened the door and took the tray from Jessop.

The supercargo rose from his seat with a smile of satisfaction. The crime he meditated seemed no crime to his base and vicious heart. He merely regarded it as a clever trick ; dangerous perhaps, but not dangerous to him ; for deeply steeped as he was in numerous villainies he had never yet been called to account for any one of his misdeeds, and long immunity had rendered him utterly hardened and callous to any sentiment of pity or remorse.

He went on deck and walked leisurely for'ard till he came abreast of the funnel. A big swarthy-faced man who was standing near the ash-hoist was awaiting him.

“Are you sober enough, Tim, not to make any mistakes ?” asked Chard, leaning forward and looking eagerly into the man's face.

Tessa

“Just as sober as you are,” was the reply, given with insolent familiarity. “I’ve kept my head pretty clear, as clear as yours and the skipper’s, anyway.”

The two conversed for a few minutes, and then separated, the supercargo going up on the bridge to join his jackal. Half-way up the ladder he heard the sound of angry voices. Hendry was quarrelling with his chief officer.

“Go and keep your watch below,” said the captain furiously, his bloodshot eyes glaring fiercely upon the mate. “I tell you that I’ll keep the beggar in irons till he rots in them, or until Mr. Chard kicks him ashore.”

“Very well, sir,” said Oliver quietly, placing his hand on the bridge rail to steady himself, for the *Motutapu* was now plunging and labouring in the heavy head sea, and Hendry was staggering about all over the bridge—“very well. But I call on Mr. Atkins here to witness that I now tell you that you are putting the ship into great danger.”

“Say another word to me, and by God I’ll put you with your friend Carr to keep him

Tessa

company!" shouted Hendry, who had now completely lost control of himself.

Oliver smiled contemptuously, but made no answer. He at once descended the bridge, and in the starboard alleyway met the chief engineer.

"This is a nice state of affairs, Oliver. Those blackguards of mine are half-drunk, and unless I get some assistance from the captain I can't keep up steam. They won't work and are saucy as well."

The mate shook his head. "You'll get no help from the captain. He and I have just had a flare-up. He's half-drunk himself, and threatened to put me in irons. And none of the native crew will go into the stokehole, that's certain."

"Well then, something serious will happen. I can keep her going at four or five knots for another hour or so, and that is all I can do. The second engineer and myself are dead-beat. She'll broach-to presently, and then you will see a pretty mess."

"I can't help it, Morrison," said the mate gloomily, as he went to his cabin.

Tessa

Up on the bridge Hendry and Chard were talking and looking out ahead. The second mate, a young, muscular man, was standing by the wheel, and giving a word of warning now and then to the native helmsman, who was Huka. Although it was not blowing hard the sea had increased greatly, and every now and then the steamer would make a plunge into a mighty valley of darkness, and only struggle up out of it with difficulty. Careful steering was a necessity, for the ship was not steaming more than four knots, and the least inattention might result in serious consequences.

“Look out for’ard!” Atkins shouted, as he saw a particularly loose, knobby sea rise suddenly up over the starboard bow. His warning was just given in time, for in another moment down dropped the black mass of water on the well deck with a thundering crash, burying the steamer completely from the bridge to foc’sle head. She rose slowly, very slowly.

Hendry lurched up towards the helmsman.

“You damned, red-hided kanaka! Couldn’t you see that coming?” and he struck the man a violent blow on the mouth. In an instant

Tessa

Huka let go the wheel, swung himself over the rail on to the deck, and ran for'ard. Atkins looked at his captain with suppressed rage as he seized the wheel, and then began to watch for the next sea.

Five minutes passed, and then a dozen dark figures made a sudden rush towards the deck-house in which Carr lay in irons. Then came the sound of smashing blows as the door was burst open with an axe, and in a few seconds Carr was brought out upon the main deck and quickly freed from his irons by Malua, to whom a duplicate key had been given by the second mate.

At first Chard and Hendry scarcely comprehended what had happened, so sudden was the onslaught, but when they saw Carr standing free on the main hatch they both made a rush aft towards Hendry's deck cabin. This they gained without opposition, and seizing two loaded Winchesters which lay in the captain's berth they darted out again, and began firing into the group of excited native seamen ten paces away. Three men at once dropped, either killed or wounded ; but the rest, nothing

Tessa

daunted at this, made a rush towards the two men, knives in hand, bore them down to the deck by sheer weight, and in a few seconds would have ended their lives had not Carr, Oliver, and Latour the steward flung themselves into the fray.

“For God’s sake, stop!” cried Oliver, “the ship is on fire!”

And then seizing Hendry by the throat, he lifted him to his feet, and shook him as a terrier shakes a rat. “You damned, drunken villain! You are not in a fit state to take charge. Lie there, you brute, and let better men try to save the ship.”

He swung Hendry’s slight figure to and fro, and then sent him reeling, to fall like a log on the deck.

“Men,” he cried, “we are in great danger, the trade-room is on fire! Atkins, for God’s sake try to keep us head to wind. Mr. Carr, you and some of the hands see to the boats. There are over fifty cases of powder in the for’ard end of the trade-room, and we can’t shift them; but only the after part is burning so far. Steward, see to Miss Remington. Her

Tessa

cabin is locked, and I cannot make her hear. She and her maid must be awakened at once. Pass the word to Mr. Morrison to get the fire hose aft. Some of you cut a hole here in the deck on the port side, just abreast of that bollard. Smart's the word and quick's the action, or we shall all be blown to hell in ten minutes if we can't flood the trade-room."

He stopped to give a brief scrutiny to the prone figure of Mr. Samuel Chard, who had been struck a smashing blow on the head from the butt of his own Winchester, which Huka had wrested from him.

"Put this beast into one of the boats, Mr. Carr. We must not leave the blackguard here, as he is not dead, and we can't save the ship, I fear. Now then, hurry along that hose."

CHAPTER V

WHILST the chief mate, aided by the now willing crew, ran aft the hose and set to work to flood the trade-room, Latour the steward, a smart little Frenchman, taking a man with him, jumped below and knocked loudly at the door of Tessa's cabin, which was the foremost but one of five on the starboard side, the intervening one separating it from the trade-room. There was no answer to his repeated cries and knocking. Then he and the native sailor each tried to force the door, but it defied their efforts, and then, as they paused for a moment, they heard the crackling sound of fire within a few feet of them.

The native seaman, a big, square-shouldered Manhikian, looked around the main cabin for a second ; then he darted into the second mate's cabin, and returned with a carpenter's broad

Tessa

axe. One smashing blow with the back of the tool started the lock, and a second sent the door flying open.

The lamp was burning brightly, but both Tessa and Maoni were sunk in a heavy slumber, and although Latour called loudly to them to arise, they made no answer, though Tessa tried to sit up, and her lips moved as she muttered incoherently, only to fall back again with closed eyelids.

There was no time to lose. Latour lifted Tessa out of her berth, and followed by the native, who carried Maoni, they hurried up the companion-way, and laid the two girls down upon the quarter-deck, where Malua took charge of them.

For nearly ten minutes the mate and crew worked hard to subdue the fire, and all might have gone well had there been a sufficient head of steam to keep the ship head to wind and the donkey-engine going, but at the first alarm the drunken, cowardly firemen had refused duty and tried to rush one of the boats, and amidst the curses and blows which Carr and Atkins were showering upon them another mighty sea

Tessa

tumbled aboard for'ard, and the *Motutapu* was half-smothered again.

Morrison crawled up exhaustedly on the deck from the engine-room.

"It's a case as far as steaming goes, Mr. Atkins. I'm done up. Send some one down into the stokehole for Mr. Studdert. He dropped a minute ago. But if you'll give me a couple of your men I can keep the engines going."

"It's no use, Morrison. None of my men would go into the stokehole to work, but they'll bring Mr. Studdert up quick enough. The ship is doomed, so don't bother. We'll have to take to the boats."

The *Motutapu* was indeed doomed, for, despite the frantic efforts of Oliver and the native crew, the fire had gained complete possession of the saloon, though every opening on deck had been battened down and all cabin ports had been closed. Most fortunately, however, the fore part of the trade-room, where the powder was stowed, had been thoroughly saturated, and both Oliver and Atkins felt assured that no danger need be apprehended from that source.

Tessa

In a few minutes the engines ceased to work, but the donkey-engine on deck, with its furnace filled with cotton waste soaked in kerosene, kept the hose going, and sent a steady stream of water through the hole cut in the after-deck. Meanwhile Harvey and the second mate, aided by the energetic little French steward, had made good progress with the boats, all three of which were ready for lowering, and contained some provisions and water. Such fore and aft canvas as the steamer carried was set, so as to keep her to the wind as much as possible, and help to steady her. Then, seeing that the flames were bursting through the sides of the saloon skylight, and that the ship would scarcely answer her helm under such miserable canvas, Oliver abandoned all hope of saving her.

“All ready, sir?” replied Atkins.

And then before they could be stopped the firemen made a rush for the best boat of the three, a fine new whaler, hanging in davits just abaft the bridge. Four of them jumped into her, the remaining two cast off the falls, and began to lower away hastily.

“You cowardly dogs!” shouted the second

Tessa

mate, rushing up to the nearest man, tearing the after-fall out of his hands, and making it fast again round the cleet, and then springing at the other man, who paused irresolutely, intimidated by Atkin's threatening visage. But though he paused but momentarily, it was fatal, for the instant the mate's back was turned the first man, with an oath of drunken defiance, cast off the fall and let it go with a run, just as the *Motutapu* was heaved up by a lofty sea, and rolled heavily to port.

A cry of terror burst from the four doomed men in the boat, as they fell headlong into the sea, and she hung by the for'ard fall, straight up and down.

"Let them drown!" roared Atkins to some native seamen who sprang to his assistance, "overboard two or three of you, and save the boat. She'll be smashed to matchwood in a minute, the after-fall has unshipped;" then whipping a knife from the belt of one of them he severed the remaining fall, and saw the boat plunge down sternwards and outwards from the side just in time; another half-minute and she would have disappeared under the steamer's

Tessa

bottom to be hopelessly stove in. And with cries of encouragement to each other, four natives leapt over the side, swam after her, clambered in and then shouted that they were all right, and would come alongside and stand by, for although the oars and other fittings had been lost, there were half a dozen canoe paddles lashed under the thwarts, and these were quickly brought into use.

All this happened in a few minutes, and as Atkins ran to assist Harvey with the two quarter boats which had been lowered, and were now standing by alongside, there came a sudden crashing of glass, as the flames in the saloon burst through the sides of the skylight, and drove every one to the main deck.

“That settles the matter,” said Oliver quietly to Harvey, as a sudden gust of flame leapt from the lee side of the skylight, and caught the fore and aft mainsail, which was quickly destroyed; then the steamer at once fell off, and the flames began to travel for’ard.

With all possible speed, but without excitement, Tessa and Maoni, who were still under the influence of the drugged coffee, and unable

Tessa

to stand, or even utter a word, were placed in the first boat, of which Atkins took charge for the time, with four natives as a crew. The second quarter boat, in which Hendry and Chard had been placed, then came alongside, and the two surviving firemen, now thoroughly cowed and trembling, and terrified into a mechanical sobriety, were brought to the gangway and told to jump.

“Jump, you rotten beggars, jump,” said Morrison; “over you go into the water if you want to save your useless lives. The men in the boat will pick you up. We are not going to risk bringing her alongside for the sake of swine like you. Over you go,” and then seizing one of them by the collar of his shirt and the belt, he sent him flying over the side, the other man jumping over to avoid rougher treatment from the native seamen, who were disgusted at their cowardice. Then Morrison, Studdert, and three natives followed, and the boat pulled away clear of the ship, and stood by.

“Pull up, boys!” cried Oliver to the men in the third boat—the one which the firemen had rushed. Then turning to Latour, who was

Tessa

standing near him with a sack half full of heavy articles—firearms, ammunition, the ship's books, etc.—he bade him go first.

Disdaining to wait for the boat to come alongside the little Frenchman sprang over the side and swam to the boat; then the bag—its contents too precious to be wetted—was adroitly lowered and caught by one of the hands. Jessop, the second steward, whose limbs were shaking with terror, was told to jump, but pleaded that he could not swim.

“You miserable hound!” cried Oliver fiercely, and he raised his hand to strike him; then a scornful pity took the place of anger, and he ordered the boat to come alongside so that he could get in.

“Now's your chance, you dirty little cur,” he said, as the boat's bow came within a foot of the steamer's side.

The fear-stricken man jumped, fell short, and in an instant disappeared under the ship, as she rolled suddenly to starboard. When he came to the surface again it was at the stern, with several broken ribs, he having struck against the propeller. He was, however, soon rescued

Tessa

and placed in safety, and then but three natives and Harvey and Oliver remained on board. The natives went first, the white men quickly followed, and clambered into the boat, which at once joined the two others, and then all three lay to, and their occupants watched the *Motutapu* drifting before the wind, with the red flames enveloping her from stern to stem.

Ordering the other boats to remain close to him until further orders, but to steer W. by N. if anything should part them from him during the night, Oliver and Harvey, as they watched the burning steamer lighting up the heaving sea for miles around, discussed their future plans, and quickly resolved upon a certain course of action to be followed in the morning.

Towards midnight the wind died away entirely, and an hour later the heavy, lumpy sea changed into a long, sweeping swell. A mile to leeward the *Motutapu* still blazed fiercely, and sent up vast volumes of smoke and flame from her forehold, where some hundreds of cases of kerosene were stowed.

The three boats were pretty close together, and Harvey, exhausted by the events of the

Tessa

day, and knowing that Tessa was safe with the second mate, was just dozing off into a "monkey's sleep" when he was awakened by a hail from Atkins.

"What's the matter, Atkins?" cried Oliver.

"We're all right, sir; but Miss Remington has just come to, and is asking for Mr. Carr, so I said I'd hail you just to show her that he is with you. Better let me come alongside."

Oliver looked at Harvey with something like a smile in his eyes.

"All right, Atkins," he replied, and then to Harvey, "Here, wake up young-fellow-my-lad, and get into the other boat with your sweetheart. I don't want you here. What's the use of you if you haven't even a bit of tobacco to give me?"

The second mate's boat drew alongside, and in another minute Harvey was seated in the stern sheets with Tessa's cheek against his own, and her arms round his neck.

"Any of you fellows got any tobacco, and a pipe to spare?" said the prosaic Oliver. "If you haven't, sheer off."

"Lashings of everything," said Atkins.

Tessa

“ Here you are : two pipes, matches, bottle of Jimmy Hennessy, and some water and biscuits. What more can you want? Who wouldn't sell a farm and go to sea? ”

CHAPTER VI

AT sunrise the three boats were all within a half-mile of each other, floating upon a smooth sea of the deepest blue. Overhead the vault of heaven was unflecked by a single cloud, though far away on the eastern sea-rim a faintly curling bank gave promise of a breeze before the sun rose much higher.

At a signal from Oliver the second mate pulled up, and he, Harvey, and the chief mate again held a brief consultation. Then Harvey went back to Oliver, and both boats came together, rowing in company alongside that of the captain's, no one speaking, and all feeling that sense of something impending, born of a sudden silence.

The captain's boat was steered by Huka, the Savage Islander; Hendry himself was sitting beside Chard in the stern sheets, Morrison and

Tessa

Studdert amidships amidst the native crew, whose faces were sullen and lowering, for in the bottom of the boat one of their number, who had been shot in the stomach by either the captain or Chard, was dying.

Hendry's always forbidding face was even more lowering than usual as his eyes turned upon the chief officer. Chard, whose head was bound up in a bloodstained handkerchief, smiled in his frank, jovial manner as he rose, lifted his cap to Tessa, and nodded pleasantly to Oliver and Harvey.

"What are your orders, sir?" asked the chief mate addressing the captain.

Hendry gave him a look of murderous hatred, and his utterance almost choked him as he replied—

"I shall give my orders presently. But where are the other firemen—five of them are missing."

"Six of them rushed this boat," answered the mate quietly; "two of them—those scoundrels there," and he pointed to the two in Hendry's boat, "let the after fall go by the run, and drowned the others."

Tessa

"I hold you responsible for the death of those men," said Hendry vindictively.

"Very well, sir," answered the mate, "but this is not the time nor place to talk about it."

"No," broke in Atkins fiercely; "no more is it the time or place to charge you, Captain Hendry, and you, Mr. Chard, with the murder of the two native seamen whose bodies we saw lying on the main hatch."

Hendry's face paled, and even Chard, self-possessed as he always was, caught his breath.

"We fired on those men to suppress a mutiny——" began Hendry, when Oliver stopped him with an oath.

"What are your orders, I ask you for the second time?" and from the natives there came a hissing sound, expressive of their hatred.

Chard muttered under his breath, "Be careful, Louis, be careful."

Suddenly the second steward raised himself from the bottom of Oliver's boat, where he had been lying, groaning in agony, and pointed a shaking finger at Chard.

"That's the man who caused it all," he half

Tessa

sobbed, half screamed. " 'E told me to let Tim Donnelly go into the trade-room, and it was Donnelly who upset the lamp and set the ship afire. 'E sent Donnelly to 'ell, and 'e's sending me there, too, curse 'im! But I'm goin' to make a clean breast of it all, I am, so help me Gawd. 'E made me give the young lady and the girl the drugged coffee, 'e did, curse 'im! I'll put you away before I die, you ——"

He sank back with a moan of agony and bloodstained lips as Chard, with clenched hands and set teeth, glared at him savagely.

A dead silence ensued as Harvey picked up a loaded Winchester, and covered the super-cargo.

"You infernal scoundrel!" he said, "it is hard for me to resist sending a bullet through you. But I hope to see you hanged for murder."

"You'll answer to me for this——" began Chard, when Oliver again interrupted.

"This is no time for quarrelling. Once more, Captain Hendry — what are your orders?"

Hendry consulted with Chard in low tones,

Tessa

then desired first of all that the wounded native should be taken into Oliver's boat.

The mate obeyed under protest. "I already have a badly injured man in my boat, sir; and that native cannot possibly live many hours longer."

Hendry made no answer, but gave the officer one of his shifty, sullen glances as the dying man was lifted out and put into Oliver's boat. Then he asked Oliver if the ship's papers, chronometer, charts, and his (Hendry's) nautical instruments had been saved.

"Here they are," and all that he had asked for was passed over to him by Harvey.

"Did you save any firearms?" was Hendry's next question.

"Yes," replied Harvey; "two Winchesters, a Snider carbine, and all the cartridges we could find in your cabin."

"Give them to me, then," said Hendry.

Harvey passed them over to the captain, together with some hundreds of cartridges tied up in a handkerchief. Hendry and Chard took them with ill-concealed satisfaction, little knowing that Harvey had carefully hidden away

Tessa

the remainder of the firearms in Atkins's boat, and therefore did not much mind obeying Hendry's demand.

When Hendry next spoke he did so in a sullenly, authoritative manner.

"Miss Remington, you and your servant must come into my boat. Mr. Morrison, you and the second engineer can take their places in the mate's boat."

The two engineers at once, at a meaning glance from Oliver, stepped out of the captain's boat, and took their seats in that of the mate. Neither Tessa nor Maoni moved.

"Make haste, please, Miss Remington," said Hendry, not looking at her as he spoke, but straight before him.

"I prefer to remain in Mr. Atkins's boat," replied Tessa decisively.

"And I tell you that you must come with me," said the captain, with subdued fury. "Mr. Atkins has no compass, and I am responsible for your safety."

"Thank you, Captain Hendry," was the mocking reply, "I relieve you of all responsibility for my safety. And I absolutely refuse

Tessa

to leave Mr. Atkins, except to go with Mr. Oliver.”

For a moment Hendry was unable to speak through passion, for he had determined that Tessa should come with them. Then he addressed the second mate. “Mr. Atkins, I order you to come alongside and put Miss Remington and that native girl into my boat.”

“You can go to hell, you Dutch hog!” was the laconic rejoinder from Atkins, as he leant upon his steer-oar and surveyed the captain and Chard with an air of studied insolence. “I’ll take no orders from a swab like you. If Miss Remington wants to stay in my boat she *shall* stay.” Then turning to Tessa he said so loudly that both Chard and captain could hear, “Never fear, miss; compass or no compass, you are safer with us than with those two.” And as Tessa looked up into his face and smiled her thanks to the sturdy young officer, Chard ground his teeth with rage, though he tried to look unconcerned and indifferent.

“It’s no use, Louis,” he muttered, “we can do nothing now; time enough later on. Give

Tessa

your orders, and don't look so infernally white about the gills."

The taunt went home, and Hendry pulled himself together. The violence with which he had been thrown down upon the deck the previous evening by the angered mate, and his present passion combined had certainly, as Chard said, made him look white about the gills.

"Very well, Miss Remington," he said, "if you refuse to come with me I cannot help it. Mr. Oliver, is your boat compass all right?"

"Yes," was the curt answer.

"Then our course is north-north-west for Ponapé. You, Mr. Atkins, as you have no compass, had better keep close to me, as if we get a squally night with heavy rain, which is very likely, we may lose sight of each other. You, Mr. Oliver, can use your own judgment. We are now five hundred miles from Ponapé."

Then, true seaman as he was, for all his villainy, he ascertained what provisions were in Atkins's boat, told him to put half into Oliver's, and also overhauled what was in his own. There was an ample supply for two or three weeks, and of water there were two

Tessa

breakers, one in his own the other in the second mate's boat. That which had been in the mate's boat had been lost when she was rushed by the firemen, and had hung stern down by the for'ard fall.

"I'll see that Mr. Oliver's boat has all the water she wants to-day," said Atkins. "She won't want any to-night. We'll get more than we shall like. It'll rain like forty thousand cats."

Hendry nodded a sullen assent to this, and turned to take the steer-oar from Huka, who, with the other native seamen, had been listening to the discussion between the captain and his officers.

Huka gave up the oar, and then telling the other natives in their own tongue to follow him, quietly slipped overboard, and swam towards the second mate's boat. They leapt after him instantly.

Hendry whipped up one of the Winchesters, and was about to stand up and fire at the swimming men when Chard tore the carbine from his grasp.

"Let them go, you blarsted fool! Let them

Tessa

go! It will be all the better for us," he said with savage earnestness, but speaking low so that the two firemen could not overhear him; "we can send the whole lot of them to hell together before we get to Ponapé. Sit down, you blithering Dutch idiot, and let them go! They are playing into our hands," and then he whispered something in the captain's ears."

Hendry looked into the supercargo's face with half-terrified, half-savage eyes.

"I'm with you, Sam. Better that than be hanged for shooting a couple of niggers."

"Just so, Louis. Now make a protest to Oliver and Atkins, and ask them to send those three natives back. They won't do it, of course, but be quick about it. Say that you have only the two firemen and myself—who are not seamen—to help you to take the boat to Ponapé."

Hendry took his cue quickly enough, and hailed the two other boats.

"Mr. Oliver, and you, Mr. Atkins. My crew have deserted me. I do not want to resort to force to make them return, but call upon you to come alongside, and put those three men back into my boat."

Tessa

Oliver made no answer for the moment. He, Harvey, Atkins, and Huka talked earnestly together for a few minutes, and then the mate stood up and spoke.

“The native crew refuse to obey your orders Captain Hendry. They accuse you and Mr. Chard of murdering three of their shipmates. And I, and every one in these two boats, know that you and Mr. Chard *did* murder them, and I’m not going to make these three men return to you. You have a good boat, with mast, mainsail and jib, and more provisions than either the second mate or myself. We have, in this boat of mine, only six canoe paddles and no sail; the second mate has oars, but no sail. You could reach Ponapé long before we do if you want to leave us in the lurch.”

“And we’ll be damned glad to be quit of your company,” shouted Atkins. “Hoist your sail, you goat-faced, sneaking Schneider, and get along! When we are ashore at Ponapé *I’ll* take it out of *you*, captain, and Mr. Carr will settle up differences with *you*, Mr. Chard—you black-faced scoundrel! And, please God, you’ll both swing in Fiji after we have done with you.”

Tessa

Hendry made no answer to the second mate's remarks, which were accompanied by a considerable number of oaths and much vigorous blasphemy; for the honest-hearted Atkins detested both his captain and the supercargo most fervently, as a pair of thoroughpaced villains.

But for very particular reasons Captain Hendry and Mr. Samuel Chard did not wish to part company with the other two boats, and therefore Atkins's gibes and threats were passed over in silence, and Oliver acceded to Hendry's request to let him tow his boat, as with the gentle breeze, and with the six canoe paddles helping her along, the two could travel quite as fast as the second mate with his six oars.

And so with a glorious sky of blue above, and over a now smooth and placid sea, just beginning to ripple under the breath of a gentle breeze, the boat voyage began.

CHAPTER VII

ALL that day the three boats made excellent progress, for though the wind was but light, the sea was very smooth, and a strong northerly current helped them materially.

As night approached heavy white clouds appeared on the eastern horizon—the precursors of a series of heavy rain squalls, which in those latitudes, and at that season of the year—November to March—are met with almost nightly, especially in the vicinity of the low-lying islands of the Marshall and Caroline Groups.

Then, as the sun set, the plan of murder that was in the hearts of the captain and supercargo began to work. During the day they had been unable to converse freely, for fear of being overheard by the two firemen, but now the time had come for them to act.

Tessa

In all the boats' lockers Harvey and Latour had placed a two gallon wicker-covered jar of rum, and presently Hendry hailed Oliver, whose boat was still towing astern. It was the first time that he had taken any notice of the occupants of the other boats since the morning.

"You can give your men some grog if you like, Mr. Oliver," he said, "and you might as well hail the second mate, and tell him to do the same. I shall have to cast you off presently, as the first rain-squall will be down on us, and each boat will have to take care of herself. We are bound to part company until the morning, but I rely on you and the second mate to keep head to wind during the squalls, and stick to the course I have given you between times."

"Very well, sir."

Chard took out the rum and filled a half-pint pannikin to the brim.

"Here you are, boys," said he pleasantly to the two firemen, who looked gloatingly at the liquor; "this will warm you up for the drenching you will get presently."

The unsuspecting, unfortunate men drank it

Tessa

off eagerly without troubling to add water, and then Chard, who feared that Hendry sober would be too great a coward for the murderous work that was to follow, poured out a stiff dose into another pannikin, and passed it to him. Then he took some himself.

“Pass along that pannikin, boys,” he said; “you might as well have a skinful while you are about it.”

The men obeyed the treacherous scoundrel with alacrity. Like their shipmates who had perished the previous night, they were thoroughly intemperate men, and were only too delighted to be able to get drunk so quickly.

Filling their pannikin, which held a pint, to the brim, Chard poured half of it into his own empty tin, and then passed them both to the men. They sat down together on the bottom boards amidships, and then raised the pannikins.

“Here’s good luck to you, Mr. Chard, and you, skipper.”

“Good luck, men,” replied Hendry, watching them keenly as they swallowed mouthful after

Tessa

mouthful of the fiery stuff, which from its strength was known to the crew of the *Motutapu* as "hell boiled down to a small half-pint."

Ten minutes passed, and then as the darkness encompassed the three boats, a sudden puff of wind came from the eastward. Hendry hailed the mate.

"Here's a squall coming, Mr. Oliver ; haul in your painter."

He cast off the tow line, and Chard lowered the mainsail and jib, the two firemen taking not the slightest notice as they continued to swallow the rum.

In another five minutes the white wall of the hissing rain squall was upon them, and everything was hidden from view. Hendry swung his boat's head round, and let her drive before it. The other boats, he knew, would keep head on to the squall, and in half an hour he would be a couple of miles away from them.

The captain's boat drove steadily before the rushing wind, and the stinging, torrential rain soon covered the bottom boards with half a foot of water. Chard took the bailer, and began to

Tessa

bail out, taking no heed of the firemen, who were lying in the water in a drunken stupor, overcome by the rum.

At last the rain ceased, and the sky cleared as if by magic, though but few stars were visible. Chard went on bailing steadily. Presently he rose, came aft, took a seat beside Hendry and looked stealthily into his face.

“Well?” muttered the captain inquiringly, as if he were afraid that the two poor wretches who but a few feet away lay like dead men might awaken.

For the moment Chard made no answer, but putting out his hand he gripped Hendry by the arm.

“Did you hear what Carr and Atkins said?” he asked in a fierce whisper.

Hendry’s sullen eyes gleamed vindictively as he nodded assent.

“Well, they mean it—if we are fools enough to give them the chance of doing it. And by God, Louis, I tell you that it means hanging for us both; if not hanging, imprisonment for life in Darlinghurst Gaol. We shot the niggers, right enough, and every man of the crew of

Tessa

the *Motutapu*, from Oliver down to Carr's servant, will go dead against us."

He paused a moment. "This has happened at a bad time for us, Louis. Two years ago Thorne, the skipper of the *Trustful*, labour schooner, his mate, second mate, boatswain and four hands were cast for death for firing into native canoes in the New Hebrides. And although none of them were hanged they are rotting in prison now, and will die in prison."

"I know," answered the captain in a whisper. "Thorne was reprieved and got a life-sentence, the other chaps got twenty-one years."

"And I tell you, Louis, that if you and I face a jury we shall stand a worse chance than Jim Thorne and his crowd did. The whole crew will go dead against us, and swear there was no attempt to mutiny—that girl and her servant too, and Jessop as well. Jessop would give us away in any case over the cause of the fire, if he said nothing else. It's their lives or ours."

"What is it to be?" muttered Hendry, drawing the steer oar inboard, and putting his eager, cruel eyes close to Chard's face.

Tessa

“This is what it must be. You and I, Louis, will be *‘the only survivors of the “Motutapu” which took fire at sea. All hands escaped in the three boats, but only the captain’s boat, containing himself and the supercargo, succeeded in reaching Ponapé after terrible hardships. The mate’s and second mate’s boats, with all their occupants, have undoubtedly been lost.’* That is what the newspapers will say, Louis, and it will be quite true, as all those in the other boats will perish. By sunrise tomorrow none of the ship’s company but you and I must be alive.”

“How are we going to do it?”

“Wait till nearly daylight, and then we can get within range of them, and pick them off one by one, if there is a good breeze. If there is no wind and we cannot keep going, we must put it off for the time. There’s two hundred and thirty Winchester and Snider cartridges in that handkerchief—I’ve counted them—and we can make short work of them.”

“What about these fellows?” said Hendry, inclining his head towards the drunken firemen.

Tessa

“They go first. They must go overboard in the next squall, which will be upon us in a few minutes. Take another drink, Louis, and don't shake so, or—” and Chard grasped Hendry by the collar and spoke with sudden fury—“or by God, I'll settle *you* first, and do the whole thing myself!”

“I'll do it, Sam ; I'll do it.”

Again the hissing rain and the hum of the squall was upon them as the ocean was blotted out from view.

“Now,” said Chard—“quick.” They sprang forward together, lifted the unconscious men one by one, and threw them over the side.

“Run up the jib,” said Hendry hoarsely ; “let us get further away.”

“You rotten-hearted Dutch cur,” and Chard seized the captain by the beard with his left hand and clenched his right threateningly, “brace yourself up, or I'll ring your neck like a fowl's, and send you overboard after them. Think of your wife and family—and of the hangman's noose dangling between you and them.”

Tessa

Throughout the night the rain squalls swept the ocean at almost hourly intervals, with more or less violence, but were never of long enough duration to raise more than a short, lumpy sea, which quickly subsided.

About an hour before dawn, however, a more than usually heavy bank formed to windward, and Harvey, with Huka and the other natives, could see that there was more wind in it than would be safe for the mate's boat, which was deep in the water, owing to the number of people in her. Oliver agreed with them that they should tranship three or four of their number into the second mate's boat.

"Better be sure than sorry, Carr," he said; "can any one of you see Mr. Atkin's boat?"

Nothing could be seen or heard of her until a boat lantern was hoisted on an oar by Oliver, and a few seconds after was responded to by Atkins soaking a piece of woollen cloth in rum, wrapping it round the point of a boathook, and setting it alight. Its flash revealed him half a mile away to leeward. Hendry and Chard, who by this time were quite three miles distant,

Tessa

saw the blazing light, and the latter wondered what it meant.

“They have parted company, I think,” said Hendry, “and as the mate’s boat is too deep I daresay he wants Atkins to take some of his people before this big squall comes down. It’s going to be an ugly fellow this, and we’ll have to drive again. I wish it would swamp ’em both. The sharks would save us a lot of trouble then.”

As quickly as possible Oliver paddled down to Atkins, and Harvey, Latour, Huka, and another native got into the second mate’s boat.

“We’ll have to run before this, Atkins,” said the mate, alluding to the approaching squall; “it will last a couple of hours or more by the look of it. Are you very wet, Miss Remington?”

“Very, Mr. Oliver,” answered the girl, with a laugh; “but I don’t mind it a bit, as the rain is not cold. I am too old a ‘sailor man’ to mind a wetting. Are you all quite well? I can’t see your face, Mr. Studdert, nor yours, Mr. Morrison, it is so dark. Oh, Mr. Studdert, I wish I had one of your cigarettes to smoke.”

Tessa

"I wish I had one to give you, miss," answered the pale-faced young engineer. "A pipe is no to my liking, but I fear me I'll have to tackle one in the morning."

Alas, poor Studdert, little did he know that the morning, now so near, was to be his last.

"Goodbye for the present, Miss Remington," called out Oliver as the boats again separated. "Take good care of her, Harvey, and of yourself too. He'll be getting an attack of the shakes in the morning, miss, after all this wetting. Give him plenty of rum, my dear, whether he likes it or not. You're a plucky little lady, and next to having you in my own boat I am glad to see you with Atkins. Cheer up, lads, one and all; we'll have the sun out in another hour."

Half an hour later both boats were driving before the fury of the squall, and the crews had to keep constantly bailing, for this time the violence of the wind was such that, despite the most careful steering of the two officers, large bodies of water came over amidships, and threatened to swamp the boats.

When dawn came the sky was again as clear as it had been on the previous morning, and

Tessa

Atkins stood up and looked for the captain's and mate's boats.

“There they are, Harvey,” and he pointed to the westward; “the skipper is under sail, and making back towards Oliver. Well, that's one thing about him, dog as he is—he's a thorough sailor man, and is standing back to take Oliver in tow again.”

At this time the captain's boat was about three miles distant from that of the second mate, and Oliver's between the two, but much nearer to Hendry and Chard's than to Atkins's. She was under both mainsail and jib, and as the sea was again very smooth was slipping through the water very quickly under a now steady breeze, as she stood towards the mate's boat.

As the red sun burst from the ocean Atkins told the crew to cease pulling for a few minutes and get something to eat. The men were all in good humour, though they yet meant to wreak their vengeance on Chard and Hendry for the murder of their shipmates. The wounded man who had been put in Oliver's boat they knew had also died, and this had still further inflamed them. But for the present they said

Tessa

nothing, but ate their biscuit and tinned beef in cheerful silence, after waiting for Tessa and Maoni to begin. Huka, their recognised leader, and Malua, Harvey's servant, had both assured them that the captain and Chard would be brought to punishment, but this assurance was not satisfactory to the majority of them. One of them, the big Manhikian who had helped Latour to rescue Tessa and Maoni from their cabin, was a brother of the man who had just died from his wounds in Oliver's boat, and he had, during the night, promised his shipmates to take his own and give them their *utu* (revenge) before the boats reached Ponapé.

"Turn to again, boys," said Atkins presently, as soon as the men had satisfied their hunger; "we must catch up to the others now."

The natives bent to their oars again, and sent the boat along at a great rate, when suddenly Harvey heard the sound of firearms. He stood up and looked ahead.

"Good God!" he cried, "look there, Atkins! The captain and Chard are firing into Oliver's boat!"

Even as he spoke the repeated crackling of

Tessa

Winchester rifles could be heard, and the mate's boat seemed to be in great confusion, and her occupants were paddling away from their assailants, who, however, were following them up closely at a distance of about fifty yards.

"Pull, men, pull! For God's sake, lay into it! The captain and firemen are murdering Mr. Oliver and his party."

The seamen uttered a shout of rage, and made the boat leap through the water as now, in addition to the sharp crackle of the Winchesters, they heard the heavier report of a Snider, and Harvey, jumping up on the after whaleback, and steadying himself with one hand on Atkins's shoulder, saw that only two or three of Oliver's crew were now paddling—the rest had been shot down.

"We'll never get there in time, Atkins," he cried, "unless we can hit those who are firing. It's Chard and the skipper! Let Huka steer."

In a few seconds the change was effected. Huka took the steer-oar, two of the after-oars were double-banked, and Atkins and Harvey sprang forward with their Sniders, and began firing at the captain's boat, though at a

Tessa

range which gave them little chance of hitting her. Every moment, however, the distance was decreasing, and the two men fired steadily and carefully. But the Winchesters still cracked for another five minutes. Then the fire from the captain's boat ceased as a shot from Atkins's rifle smashed into her amidships. She was suddenly put before the wind, and then Chard came aft, and began firing at the approaching boat with his Snider, in the hope of disabling her, so that he and his fellow-murderer (now that their plan of utterly destroying all the occupants of both boats had been so unexpectedly frustrated) might escape.

But the work of slaughter in which he had just been engaged and the rolling of the boat, together with the continuous hum of bullets overhead, made his aim wild, and neither the second mate's boat nor any of its people were hit, and she swept along to the rescue.

CHAPTER VIII

AN exclamation of horror burst from Harvey as the boat, with its panting crew, dashed up alongside that of the chief mate.

“For God’s sake, Tessa, do not look!” he cried hoarsely.

For the half-sunken boat was a shambles, and of her nine occupants only three were alive—the second steward Jessop, Morrison, and Oliver himself. The latter lay in the stern sheets with a bullet hole through his chest, and a smashed hip; he had but just time to raise his hand in mute farewell to Harvey and Atkins, and then breathed his last.

Morrison, whose spine was broken by a Winchester bullet, but who was perfectly conscious, was at once lifted out and placed in Atkins’s boat, and Tessa, with the tears streaming down her pale face, and trying hard to restrain her

Tessa

sobs, pillowed his old, grey head upon Atkins's coat. Then Jessop, who was evidently still in agony from his broken ribs, one of which, so Morrison said in a faint voice, had, he thought, been driven into his lungs, was placed beside him.

Poor Studdert and the five native seamen were dead, some of them having received as many as five or six bullet wounds. Studdert himself had been shot through the head, and lay for'ard with his pale face upturned to the sky, and his eyes closed as if in a peaceful sleep.

The boat had been pierced in several places below the water-line by Snider bullets, and by the time Morrison and Jessop had been removed, and Harvey and Atkins had satisfied themselves that the other seven men in her were dead, she was nearly full of water—not the clear, bright water of the ocean alone, but water deeply stained with the blood of the murdered men.

“We must cast off,” said Atkins in a low voice, “we can do no more.”

As he spoke a bullet from Chard's Snider struck the water about thirty yards away, and springing up, he seized his own rifle again.

Tessa

Huka placed his hand on the officer's arm, and then turned to Harvey and spoke in Samoan, gravely and with solemn emphasis, though his brown cheeks were wetted with tears.

"Let us take no heed of the bullets that come. Here be six dead men whose souls have gone to God for judgment. Let us pray for them."

Atkins, his blazing eyes fixed on the captain's boat, from which every few seconds a bullet came humming overhead, or striking the water within a few yards, laid down the rifle and took off his cap.

"Go ahead, Huka. You're a better Christian than me. Sling out a prayer for these poor chaps as quick as you can. We can't bury them in a decent, shipshape fashion."

Two men stepped into the sinking, shot-torn boat, and then Huka stood up amidships among his comrades, with bowed head, and his hands crossed upon his great naked chest. He prayed in Samoan.

"O Jehovah, who holdeth the great sea in the hollow of Thy hand, we commit to its depths

Tessa

these the bodies of our shipmates who have been slain. O Father, most just and most merciful, let them become of Thy kingdom. Amen."

Then, one by one, the bodies of Studdert and of the five natives were dropped overboard by the two seamen as reverently as circumstances permitted, and in silence broken only by the suppressed sobbing of the two girls.

Such stores as were in poor Oliver's boat were next taken out, and then the wrecked and blood-stained craft was cast adrift and left to fill.

As the second mate grasped the haft of the steer-oar again another shot from the captain's boat fell some distance ahead.

"He's running away from us as fast as he can," said Harvey; "look, he's hauled up a couple of points!"

"Ay, so he has. And our short Sniders won't carry any further than the one he's firing with, so we have no chance of hitting him, I'm afraid. However, just let us try. How many Sniders have we?"

"Seven."

"Avast pulling, lads. We'll give him a parting shot together. Maybe we might drop

Tessa

a bullet into him. Get out the other five Sniders, Harvey; the Winchesters are no use at such a range."

The boat was swung broadside on, and the two white men and five natives fired a volley together. Tessa stood up on the after-thwart, and watched through Atkin's glasses; the heavy bullets all fell short.

"Never mind, lads," said Atkins. "God Almighty ain't going to let those two men escape. Now, Harvey, what about ourselves? What is it to be? Ponapé, or the nearest land?"

"The nearest land, for Gawd's sake," sobbed Jessop. "I ain't got long to live, and for Christ's sake don't chuck me overboard to be chawed up by the sharks like a piece o' dead meat."

"Man," said a faint voice beside him, "ye're ower particular, I'm thinking. And it would be a verra hungry shark that wad hae the indecency to eat such a puir chicken-hearted creature as yourself, ye miserable cur! Are ye no ashamed to be whining before the two lasses?"

Tessa

It was the dying Morrison who spoke. Tessa bent over him. "Do not be angry with him," she whispered, "he is in great agony."

" " Ay, I hae no doubt he's in verra great pain ; but ye see, my dear, I'm auld and crotchety, and the creature's verra annoying wi' his whingein and moaning and fearsome blasphemy."

Tessa, who knew as well as the brave old man knew himself that he was dying, placed her soft hand on his rugged brow in silent sympathy ; he looked up at her with a cheerful smile.

Harvey and Atkins consulted. Ponapé was between four and five hundred miles distant, a long voyage for a deeply-laden boat without a sail. Two hundred miles to the westward was Pikirami Atoll (the "Greenwich Island" of the charts), and a hundred and eighty miles north of that was Nukuor, the most southerly of the vast archipelago of the Caroline Islands.

" I don't know what is best for us to do, Atkins," said the trader. " At this time of the year we can count upon every night being such

Tessa

as it was last night, perhaps a great deal worse ; and we must either turn tail to the squalls or put out a sea anchor and drift. This means that we'll make no headway at all at night time, and be set steadily to the westward, and out of our course for Ponapé. If we had a sail it would be right enough, as we could lay up for there—within a couple of points anyway. But we have no sail, and willing as the men are to pull, it will be terribly exhausting.”

Atkins nodded. “Just so, Mr. Carr. If, as you say, we had a sail it would be different. Without one it may take us a fortnight or more to get to Ponapé.”

“Quite. Now on the other hand, Pikirami Lagoon lies less than a hundred and fifty miles dead to leeward of us. It is low, but I don't think we shall miss it if we steer W. by S., as on the south end there is a coral mound about a hundred feet high. If we do miss it we can steer south for New Ireland ; we can't miss *that* if we tried to, and would get there sooner than we could reach Ponapé. Then there is another advantage in our making for Pikirami—we can run before the night squalls,

Tessa

and the harder they blow the better it will be for us—we'll get there all the sooner."

Then Harvey went on to say that at Piki-rami—which he knew well—they would meet with a friendly reception from the few natives who inhabited two islets out of the thirty which formed the atoll. Twice every year the place was visited by a small German trading schooner from Blanche Bay, in New Britain, and possibly, he thought, they might either find her there loading a cargo of copra; or, if not, they could wait for her. In the latter case he would on Tessa's behalf charter the vessel to take them all to Ponapé, for her father's name and credit were well known from one end of the Pacific to the other, and there would be no difficulty in making terms with the master.

Atkins agreed willingly to Harvey's suggestions, for he well knew the great risks that would attend the attempt to reach Ponapé under such circumstances as were theirs; and the native crew, much as they wished to pursue the captain and wreak their vengeance upon him and the supercargo, readily acquiesced in Harvey's plan of steering for Pikirami Lagoon

Tessa

when he pointed out to them the difficulties and dangers that lay before them by making for Ponapé, or, indeed, any other island of the Caroline Group.

“And those men there,” said Harvey, speaking in Samoan, and pointing to the captain’s boat, which was now more than a mile distant, “cannot escape punishment for their crimes ; for is not this the word of God : ‘Thou shalt do no murder’ ? And those two men have done murder, and God will call them to account.”

Roka, the big Manhikian native, whose brother had been killed, answered for himself and his comrades in the same tongue.

“Ay, that is true. But yet it is hard that I, whose brother’s blood is before my eyes and the smell of it in my nostrils, cannot see these men die. How can we tell, master, that men will judge them for their crimes ? They are sailing away, and may reach some country far distant, and so be safe.”

Harvey partly assented. “They may escape for a time, Roka, but not for long. Rest assured of that.”

Tessa

Then a tot of rum was served out to each man, and the boat's head put W. by S. for Pikirami Lagoon, while Tessa and Maoni set to work under Atkins's directions to sew together some odd pieces of calico and navy blue print, which Latour the steward had fortunately thrust into the sack containing the firearms. When it was completed it made a fairly sized squaresail, which could always be used during light winds.

The captain's boat had disappeared from view, when Jessop the second steward beckoned to Harvey to come to him.

"Ask the young lady to go for'ard, mister, will you?" he said, turning his haggard eyes upon the trader's face. "I feel as 'ow I'm goin', an' I said I would make a clean breast of it. But I don't want 'er to 'ear; do ye twig, mister, though I'll tell you and Mr. Hatkins?"

Harvey nodded, and whispered to Tessa to go for'ard. "The poor little beggar is dying, Tessa, and has something to tell me."

Tessa and Maoni went for'ard and sat down under the shade of the newly-made mainsail,

Tessa

which was hoisted upon an oar with a bamboo yard. There they were quite out of hearing of the vile confession of Jessop's complicity with Chard and the captain made by the wretched man, who was now sinking fast, and knew that his hours were numbered, for, as Morrison had surmised, one of his lungs was fatally injured. And when he had finished the low-spoken tale of his villainy even the rough-natured Atkins was filled with pity when he saw how the poor wretch was suffering, both physically and mentally.

"You've done right, Jessop, in telling us this ; it'll be all the better for you when you have to stand before the Almighty, won't it, Mr. Carr?"

"Yes, indeed, Jessop," said Harvey kindly ; "and I wish we could do something to alleviate your pain, poor fellow !"

"Never mind, sir. You're a gent if ever there was one, and you 'as taken away a lot o' the pain I've 'ad in me 'eart by forgivin' me. And perhaps the young lady will just let me tell 'er I'm sorry, and give me 'er 'and before I go."

Tessa

Atkins beckoned to Tessa, who came quickly aft and knelt beside the dying man, who looked into her soft, sympathetic face longingly yet fearfully.

“I’m a bad lot, miss, as Mr. Carr will tell you when I’m dead. It was me that give you and Monny the drugged coffee, and I want you to forgive me, an’ give me your ’and.”

Tessa looked wonderingly at Harvey, who bent towards her and whispered a few words. In an instant she took Jessop’s hand between both of hers.

“Poor Jessop,” she said softly, “I forgive you freely, and I do hope you will get better soon.”

He looked at her with dimmed, wistful eyes. “Thank you, miss. You’re very kind to a cove like me. Will you ’old me ’and a bit longer, please.”

Early in the afternoon, as the boat slipped lazily over the gentle ocean swell, he died. And though Atkins and Harvey would have liked to have acceded to his last wishes to be buried on shore, stern necessity forbade them so doing, for they knew not how long it would

Tessa

be ere they reached Pikirami ; and so at sunset his body was consigned to the deep.

For the rest of that day, and during the night, when the white rain squalls came with a droning, angry hum from the eastward and drenched the people with a furious downpour, flattening the heaving swell with its weight, the boat kept steadily on her course ; and, but for the shadow of death which hourly grew darker over poor Morrison, the voyagers would have talked and laughed and made light of their sodden and miserable surroundings. Morrison himself was the most cheerful man in the boat, and when Atkins and Harvey rigged an oilskin coat over him to keep the rain from his face at least he protested as vigorously as he could, saying that he did not mind the rain a bit, and urging them to use it to protect "the two lassies" from the blinding and deafening downpour.

Dawn at last.

The misty sea haze lifted and scattered before the first breath of the gentle breeze, a blood-red

Tessa

sun leapt from the shimmering water-line to windward; a frigate bird and his mate swept swiftly through the air from the westward to view the dark spot upon the ocean two thousand feet below, and day had come again.

Tessa had the engineer's old, grey head pillowed on her lap. Harvey held his right hand, and Atkins, who knew that the end was near, had taken off his soddened cap, and bent his face low over the haft of the steer-oar.

"Do you feel any pain, Mr. Morrison?" asked Tessa, as she stroked the old man's face, and tried to hide her tears.

"Well, I wouldna be for saying no, and I wouldna be for saying yes, my dearie," replied the brave old fellow; "I'm no complaining about mysel', but I'd like to see ye 'saft and warm,' as we Scots say, instead of sitting here wi' my auld, greasy head in your lap, and your ain puir body shivering wi' cauld. Gie me your hand, Harvey Carr . . . and yours too, Miss Remington.. May God guide ye both together; and you too, Atkins, for ye are a guid sailor man, and a honest one, too. And if ye can get to this lagoon in time—ye know

Tessa

what I mean—ye'll pit my auld bones under God's earth and no cast me overboard?"

Atkins was beside him in a moment. "Brace up, Morrison, old man, you're a long way off dead yet," he said, with rough sympathy.

"Nay, Atkins, I'm verra near . . . verra near. But I hae no fear. I'm no afraid of what is to come; because I hae a clean sheet o' my life to show to the Almighty—I'm no like that puir devil Jessop. Harvey man, listen to me. Long, long ago, when I was a bairn at my mother's knee, I read a vairse of poetry which has never come to my mind till now, when I'm verra near my Maker. I canna repeat the exact words, but I think it goes like this," he whispered,

"He who, from zone to zone,
Guides o'er the trackless main the sea-bird's flight,
In the long way that I must tread alone
Will guide my steps aright."

"May God guide us all as He guides the sea-bird, and as He has guided you," said Tessa sobbingly, as she pressed her lips to his cheek.

Morrison took her hand and held it tightly,

Tessa

“God help and bless ye, lassie. May ye and Harvey never see the shadow of a sorrow in your lives. Atkins, ye’ll tak’ guid care to remember that there is a hundred and sixty-three pounds due to me frae Hillingdon and MacFreeland, and that if ye do not care to take it yoursel’, it must go to auld John Cameron, the sailors’ parson in Sydney. Ye hae ony amount of witnesses to hear what I’m now telling ye. I’m no for being long wi’ ye, and I dinna want yoursel’ nor auld Jock Cameron to be robbed.”

“I’ll see that the old parson gets it, Morrison,” said Atkins huskily; “he’ll do more good with it than a man like me.”

“Man,” said the old engineer, as he lifted his kindly grey eyes to the second mate, “ye’re welcome to it. I wish it were a thousand, for ye’re a grand sailor man, wi’ a big heart, and maybe ye hae some good woman waiting for ye; and a hunner and sixty pound is no sma’ help to——”

His voice failed, but his lips were smiling still as he gave his last sigh; and then his head lay still in Tessa’s arms.

CHAPTER IX

ALL that day over a gently heaving sea the boat sped steadily onward before the soft breath of the dying trade wind, and when night fell Harvey and Atkins reckoned that they could not be more than twenty miles from Pikirami. About midnight, therefore, the sail was lowered, and the boat allowed to drift, as otherwise she might have run past the island in the darkness. Two of the natives were placed on the look-out for indications of the land, and the rest of the people, except Harvey, laid down and slept, for after one or two rain squalls early in the evening the night had turned out fine and dry.

Poor Morrison's body had been covered up and placed under the for'ard thwarts; amidships lay Atkins, who had fallen asleep with his pipe in his mouth and his head pillowed on the

Tessa

naked chest of one of the native sailors ; aft, in the stern sheets, Tessa and Maoni slept with their arms around each other, Tessa's pale cheek lying upon the soft, rounded bosom of the native girl. Still further aft, on the whale-back, Harvey sat, cross-legged, contentedly smoking a stumpy clay pipe lent to him by Huka, and looking, now at the glorious, myriad-starred sky above, and now at the beautiful face just beneath him, and musing upon the events of the past few days. Then as his eye rested for a moment or two on the stiffened form of the dead engineer, his face hardened, and he thought of Chard and the captain. Where were they now? Making for Ponapé, no doubt, with all possible speed, so that they might escape in some passing whale-ship or vessel bound China-wards. But where could they go? What civilised country would afford protection to such fiendish and cruel murderers? Neither of them dare dream of ever putting foot on Australian soil again if a single one of the survivors of the *Motutapu* reached there before them. Then he thought of Hendry's wife and three fair daughters.

Tessa

“Poor things,” he muttered, “the story of their father’s crime will break their hearts, and make life desolate to them. Better for them if the Almighty, in His mercy, took them before this frightful tale is told to wreck their lives.”

An hour passed, and then Roka, who was one of the look-outs, came aft, stepping softly so as not to awaken the sleepers.

“What is it, Roka?”

“Listen,” whispered the native, “dost hear the call of the *kanapu*? There be many of them about us in the air; so this land of Pikirami must be near.”

Harvey nodded and listened, and though his ear was not so quick as that of the sailor, he soon caught the low, hoarse notes of the *kanapu*, a large bird of the booby species, which among the islands of the North-West Pacific fishes at night-time and sleeps most of the day; its principal food being flying-fish and *atuli*, or young bonito, which, always swimming on the surface, fall an easy prey to the keen-eyed, sharp, blue-beaked bird.

“Ay, Roka,” said the trader, “we be near

Tessa

the land, for the *kanapu* never wandereth far from the shore."

Low as he spoke, Tessa heard him, for she slumbered but lightly. She rose and sat up, deftly winding her loosened hair about her head.

"Is it land, Harvey?"

"Land is near, Tessa. We can hear the *kanapu* calling to each other."

"I am so glad, Harvey; for it would be terribly hard upon the men if we missed *Pikirami* and had to make for New Britain."

"Ay, it would indeed. So far we have been very lucky, however, yet even if we had missed it, we should have no cause to fear. We have a fine boat, provisions and water, a good crew, and one of the best sailor men that ever trod a deck in command," and he pointed to the sleeping second mate.

Then as they sat together, listening to the cries of the sea-birds, and waiting for the dawn, Harvey re-told to Tessa, for Roka's benefit, the story of that dreadful boat voyage sixteen years before, in which his father and five others had perished from hunger and thirst.

Tessa

“I was but fourteen years of age then, and people wondered how a boy like me survived when strong men had died. They did not know that every one of those thirteen men, unasked by my father, had put aside some portion of their miserable allowance for me, and I, God forgive me for doing so, took it. One man, a big Norwegian, was so fearful of going mad with the agonies of thirst, that he knelt down and offered up a prayer, then he shook hands with us all—my father was already dead—and jumped overboard. We were all too weak to try and save him. And less than an hour afterwards God’s rain came, as my father had said it would come just before he died.”

Atkins, with a last mighty snore, awoke, sat up, and filled his pipe again.

“What, awake, miss!” he said with rough good-humour to Tessa. “How goes it, Mr. Carr?”

“Bully, old man. We’re near the land; we can hear some *kanapu* about us, so we can’t be more than five or six miles away.”

“The land is there,” said Roka to Harvey,

Tessa

pointing to a dark shadow abeam of the boat, "and we could see it but for the rain-clouds which hide it from us."

Harvey grasped the steer oar, the crew were aroused, and in another few minutes the boat was under way again, heading for the sombre cloud to the westward under which Roka said the land lay.

And he was right. For as the dawn broke there came to the listening ears in the boat the low hum of the surf upon the coral reef; and then, as the rain-cloud dissolved and vanished to leeward, a long line of coco-palms stood up from the sea three miles away, and the bright golden rays of the rising sun shone upon a beach of snow-white sand, between which and the curling breakers that fell upon the barrier reef there lay a belt of pale green water as smooth as a mountain lake.

"Up with the sail, boys," cried Harvey, with sparkling eyes, turning to Atkins as he spoke; "the passage into the lagoon is on the south side, just round that high mound of coral, and the native village is on the first islet on this side of the passage. Keep her going, my lads;

Tessa

we shall be drinking young coconuts and stretching our legs in another half an hour."

The sail was hoisted, and, with five oars assisting, the boat was kept away two or three points, till the entrance to the lagoon was opened out, and the weary voyagers saw before them a scene of quiet beauty and repose that filled their hearts with thankfulness. Nestling under a grove of coco-palms was a village of not more than a dozen thatched houses, whose people had but just awakened to another day of easy labour—labour that was never a task. As Harvey steered the boat in between the coral walls of the narrow passage, two or three thin columns of pale blue smoke ascended from the palm grove, and presently some women and children, clad only in their thick girdles of grass, came out from the houses and walked towards the beach for their morning bathe. Then the *click-clack* of the oars in the rowlocks made them look seaward, to utter a scream of astonishment at the strange sight of the crowded boat so suddenly appearing before them. In another ten seconds every man, woman, and child in the village—about fifty

Tessa

people all told—were clustered together on the beach, shouting and gesticulating in the most frantic excitement, some of the men rushing into the water, and calling out to the white men to steer clear of several submerged coral boulders which lay directly in the boat's track.

But their astonishment was intensified when Harvey answered them in their own tongue.

“I thank ye, friends, but I have been to this land of thine many times. Have ye all forgotten me so soon?”

That they had not forgotten was quickly evident, for his name was shouted again and again with eager, welcoming cries as the boat was run up on to the hard, white sand of the shining beach, and he, Atkins, Tessa, and their companions were literally pounced upon by the delighted people and carried up to the head-man's house. Ten minutes later every family was busy preparing food for their unexpected visitors; and pigs, fowls, and ducks were being slaughtered throughout the islet, whilst Tessa and her faithful Maoni were simply overwhelmed with caresses from the women and children, who were anxious to hear the story of

Tessa

their adventures from the time of the burning of the steamer to the moment of their arrival in the lagoon.

Calling the head-man apart Harvey pointed to the body of Morrison, which was then being carried up from the boat.

“Ere we eat and drink, let us think of the dead,” he said.

The kindly-hearted and sympathetic natives at once set to work to dig out a grave beneath a wide-spreading pandanus palm, which grew on the side of the coral mound overlooking the waters of the placid lagoon ; whilst some of the women brought Atkins and Harvey clean new mats to serve as a shroud for their dead ship-mate.

Then mustering the hands together, Atkins, with Harvey, Roka, and Huka, carried the body to its last resting-place, and Huka, as Latour the steward dropped a handful of the sandy soil into the grave, prayed as he had prayed over the bodies of those who had been buried at sea—simply, yet touchingly—and then the party returned along the narrow palm-shaded path to the village.

Tessa

Much to Harvey's satisfaction, the head-man informed him that a trading schooner was expected to reach Pikirami within two or three weeks, as nearly six months had passed since her last visit, and she always came twice a year.

"That will suit us well," said Harvey to Tessa and Atkins, as they sat in the head-man's cool, shady house and ate the food that had been brought to them. "We can well wait here for two or three weeks; and the skipper of the *Sikiana* will be glad enough to earn five or six hundred dollars by giving us a passage to Ponapé. I know him very well; he's a decent little Dutchman named Westphalen, who has sailed so long in English and American ships that he's civilised. He was with me, Tessa, when I was sailing the *Belle Brandon* for your father."

Soon after noon the crew, after having had a good rest, set to work to overhaul the boat in a large canoe shed, for quite possibly they might have to put to sea in her again, if anything should prevent the *Sikiana* from calling at the island in a reasonable time.

CHAPTER X

THAT night as the second mate and his companions were sleeping peacefully under the thatched roofs of the little native village, with nought to disturb their slumbers but the gentle lapping of the waters of the lagoon on the sandy beach, and the ceaseless call of the reef beyond, Hendry and his companion in crime were sitting in their boat talking earnestly.

The captain was steering ; Chard sat on the after-thwart, facing him.

“ I tell you that I don't care much what we do, Louis,” said the supercargo, with a reckless laugh, as he looked into the captain's sullen face. “ We've made a damned mess of it, and I don't see how we are to get out of it by going to Ponapé.”

“ Then what are we to do ? ” asked Hendry in a curious, husky voice, for Chard's mocking,

Tessa

careless manner filled him with a savage hatred, which only his fear of the man made him restrain.

“Let us talk it over quietly, Louis. But take a drink first,” and he handed the captain some rum-and-water. Hendry drank it in gloomy silence, and waited till the supercargo had taken some himself.

“Now, Louis, here is the position. We *can't* go to Ponapé, for Atkins will very likely get there as soon as we could, for with light winds such as we have had to-day he would soon pass us with six oars, deep as he is in the water. And even if we got there a week before him, we might not find a ship bound to Sydney or anywhere else.”

“But there is a chance of finding one.”

“True, there *is* a chance. But there is also a chance of Atkins's boat being picked up at sea this very day, or the next, or a month hence, and he and his crowd reaching Sydney long before us. And *I* don't want to run my neck into the noose that will be waiting there. Neither do you, I suppose?”

“Why in the name of hell do you keep on

Tessa

talking about *that?*” burst from the captain ;
“ don’t I know it as well as you ? ”

“ Very well, I won’t allude to such an unpleasant possibility—I *should* say certainty—again,” replied Chard coolly. “ But as I was saying, the chances are against us. If we kept on for Ponapé we should either be collared the moment we put foot ashore, or before we get away from there to China or any other place, for Atkins is bound to turn up there, unless, by a stroke of good luck for us, he meets with bad weather, and they all go to the bottom. That’s one chance in our favour.”

“ His boat is certainly very deep,” said Hendry musingly, as he nervously stroked his long beard.

“ She is ; but then she has a kanaka crew, and I never yet heard of a drowned kanaka, any more than I’ve heard of a dead donkey. With a white crew she would stand to run some heavy risks in bad weather, with kanakas she’d keep afloat anyhow.”

Hendry uttered an oath, and tugged at his beard savagely. “ Go on, go on, then. Don’t keep harping on the pros and cons.”

Tessa

“Take another drink, man. Don’t behave like a fretful child. Curse it all! To think of us being euchred so easily by Carr and Atkins! Why, they must have half a boat load of Winchester and Sniders, judging by the way they were firing. . . . There, drink that, Louis. Oh, if we had had but a couple of those long trade Sniders out of the trade-room!” He struck his clenched fist upon the thwart. “We could have kept our own distance from the second mate, and finished him and his crowd as easily as we did the others.”

“Well, we didn’t have them,” said the captain gloomily; “and if we had thought of getting them, we were neither of us able to stand on our feet after the mauling we got on board.”

Chard drank some more rum, and went on smoking in silence for a few moments; then he resumed:

“You have a wife and family and property in Sydney, and I feel sorry for you, Louis, by God, I do. But for you to think of going there again means certain death, as certain for you as it is for me. But this is what we *can* do. We

Tessa

have a good boat, and well found, and can steer for the Admiralty Group, where we are dead sure to meet with some of the sperm whalers. From there we can get a passage to Manila, and at Manila you can write to your wife and fix up your future. Get her to sell your house and property quietly, and come and join you there. I daresay," he laughed mockingly, "she'll know by the time she gets your letter that you're not likely to go to Sydney to bring her. And then of course none of her and your friends will think it strange that she should leave Sydney, where your name and mine will be pretty notorious. There's two Dutch mail boats running to Manila from Sydney—the *Atjeh* and the *Generaal Pel*. In six months' time, after Atkins and Carr get to Sydney, the *Motutapu* affair will be forgotten, and you and your family can settle down under a new name in some other part of the world. That is what I mean to do, anyway."

Hendry listened with the closest attention, and something like a sigh escaped from his over-burdened bosom. "I suppose it's the best thing, Sam."

"It is the *only* thing."

Tessa

The captain bent down and looked at the compass and thought for a moment.

“About S.W. will be the course for to-night. To-morrow I can tell better when I get the sun and a look at the chart. Anyway, S.W. is within a point or less of a good course for the Admiralty Group.”

He wore the boat's head round, as Chard eased off the main-sheet in silence, and for the rest of the night they took turn and turn about at the steer-oar.

In the morning a light breeze set in, and the whaleboat slipped over the sunlit sea like a snow-white bird, with the water bubbling and hissing under her clean-cut stem. Then Hendry examined his chart.

“We'll sight nothing between here and the Admiralty Group, except Greenwich Island, which is right athwart our course.”

“Do you know it?”

“No; but I've heard that there is a passage into the lagoon. We might put in and spell there for a day or two; or, if we don't go inside, we could land anywhere on one of the lee-side islands, and get some young coconuts and a turtle or two.”

Tessa

“ Any natives there ? ”

“ Not any, as far as I know, though I've heard that there were a few there about twenty years ago. I expect they have either died out or emigrated to the northward. And if there are any there, and they don't want us to land, we can go on and leave them alone. We have plenty of provisions for a month, and will get more water than we want every night as long as we are in this cursed rainy belt. What we do want is wind. This breeze has no heart in it, and it looks like a calm before noon, or else it will haul round to the wrong quarter.”

His former surmise proved correct, for about midday the boat was becalmed on an oily, steamy sea under a fierce, brazen sun. This lasted for the remainder of the day, and then was followed by the usual squally night.

And so for three days they sailed, making but little progress during the daytime, for the wind was light and baffling, but doing much better at night.

On the evening of the third day they sighted the northernmost islet of Pikirami lagoon, and

Tessa

stood by under its lee till daylight, little dreaming that those whose life-blood they would so eagerly have shed were sleeping calmly and peacefully in the native village fifteen miles away.

With the dawn came a sudden terrific down-pour of rain, which lasted but for a few minutes, and both Chard and Hendry knew, from their own experience and from the appearance of the sky, that such outbursts were likely to continue for at least five or six days, with but brief intervals of cessation.

“We might as well get ashore somewhere about here,” said Hendry; “this is the tail-end of the rainy season, and we can expect heavy rain and nasty squalls for a week at least. It’s come on a bit earlier than I expected, and I think we’ll be better ashore than boxing about at sea. Can you see the land to the south’ard?”

Chard stood up and shielded his eyes from the still falling rain, but it was too thick for him to discern anything but the misty outline of the palm-fringed shore immediately near them.

“We’ll wait a bit till it’s a little clearer, and

Tessa

then we'll run in over the reef just abreast of us," said Hendry ; "it's about high water, and as there is no surf we can cross over into the lagoon without any trouble, and pick out a camping-place somewhere on the inner beach."

They lowered the sail and mast, took out their oars, and waited till they could see clearly before them. A few minutes later they were pulling over the reef, on which there was no break, and in another half a mile they reached the shore of the most northern of the chain of islets encompassing the lagoon, and made the boat's painter fast to the serried roots of a pandanus palm growing at the edge of the water.

Then they sought rest and shelter from the next downpour beneath the overhanging summits of some huge, creeper-clad boulders of coral rock, which lay piled together in the midst of the dense scrub, just beyond high-water mark.

Bringing their arms and some provisions from the boat, they placed them on the dry sandy soil under one of the boulders, ate their breakfast, and then slept the sleep of men mentally and physically exhausted.

Tessa

When they awoke the rain had cleared off, and the sun was shining brightly. By the captain's watch it was a little past one o'clock, and after looking at the boat, which was high and dry on the beach; for the tide was now dead low, Chard suggested that they should make a brief examination of the islet, and get some young drinking and some fully-grown coconuts for use in the boat.

"Very likely we'll find some turtle eggs too," he added; "this and next month is the season. We are bound to get a turtle or two, anyway, if we watch to-night on the beach."

Returning to the camp, they picked up their loaded Winchesters and started off, walking along the beach on the inner side of the lagoon, and going in a northerly direction. The islet, although less than a mile and a half in circumference, was densely wooded and highly fertile, for in addition to the countless coco-palms which were laden with nuts in all stages of growth, and fringed the shore in an unbroken circle, there were great numbers of pandanus and jackfruit-trees growing further back. Here

Tessa

and there were to be seen traces of former inhabitants—depressions of an acre or so in extent, surrounded by high banks of soil, now thickly clothed with verdure, and which Chard, who had had a fair experience of the South Seas, knew were once plantations of *puraka*, the gigantic *taro* plant of the low-lying islands of the South and North Pacific.

“It must be a hundred years or more since any one worked at these *puraka* patches,” he said to Hendry, as he sat upon the top of a bank and looked down. “Look at the big trees growing all around us on the banks. There can’t be natives living anywhere on the atoll now, so I don’t think we need to keep a night watch as long as we stop here.”

But had Harvey Carr or any one of the native crew sat there on the bank, *they* would have quickly discovered many evidences of the spot having been visited very recently—the broken branch of a tree, a leaf basket lying flattened and rotting, and half covered by the sandy soil; a necklace of withered berries thrown aside by a native girl, and the crinkled and yellowed husks of some young coconuts which

Tessa

had been drunk not many weeks before by a fishing party.

At the extreme northern point of the islet there stood a mound of coral slab, piled up by the action of the sea, and similar to the much larger one fifteen miles away at the other end of the lagoon. With some difficulty the two men succeeded in gaining the summit, and from there, at a height of fifty feet, they had a view of the greater portion of the atoll, and of some of the green chain of islands it enclosed. On no one of them could they discern signs of human occupancy, only long, long lines of cocos, with graceful slender boles leaning westward to the sea, and whose waving crowns of plumes cast their shadows upon the white sand beneath. From the beach itself to the barrier reef, a mile or two away, the water was a clear, pale green, unblemished in its purity except by an occasional patch of growing coral, which changed its colours from grey to purple and from purple to jetty black as a passing cloud for a brief space dimmed the lustre of the tropic sun. Beyond the line of green the great curving sweep of reef, with the snow-white,

Tessa

ever-breaking, murmuring surf churning and frothing upon it ; and, just beyond that, the deep, deep blue of the Pacific.

“ There’s no natives here, Louis,” said Chard confidently, as his keen, black eyes traversed the scene before them ; “ we can see a clear seven or eight miles along the beaches, and there’s not a canoe to be seen on any one of them. We’ll spell here for a day or two, or more, if the weather has not settled.”

Hendry nodded in his usual sullen manner. “ All right. We want a day to overhaul the boat thoroughly ; the mainsail wants looking to as well.”

“ Well, let us get back, and then we’ll have a look over the next islet to this one before dark. We may come across some turtle tracks and get a nest of eggs.”

They descended the mound, and set out along the outer beach on their way back to the camp.

Had they remained but a few minutes longer they would have seen two canoes come into view about three miles to the southward, paddling leisurely towards the northernmost islet.

CHAPTER XI

THE two canoes were manned by some of the crew of the *Motutapu*, together with six natives of Pikirami; one was steered by Harvey, the other by Huka the Savage Islander; and as they paddled along within a few feet of each other the crews laughed and jested in the manner inherent to all the Malayo-Polynesians when intent on pleasure.

That morning Harvey, tiring of the inaction of the past three days, had eagerly assented to a proposal made by Huka that they should make a trip round the lagoon, and spend a day or two away from the village, fishing and shooting. Several young Pikirami natives at once launched two of their best canoes, and placed them at Harvey's and Atkins's service, and offered to go with the party and do all the paddling, cooking, etc.

Tessa

“Ay,” said Nena the head-man, a little wizen-faced but kindly-eyed old fellow, whose body was so deeply tatoed in broad vertical bands that scarcely a strip of brown skin could be seen—“ay, ye must take my young men ; for are ye not our guests, ye, and the brown sailor men as well ? and they shall tend on ye all. That is our custom to strangers who have come to us as friends.”

Preparations were at once made for a start, and Harvey went to tell Tessa, whom he found in the house allotted to her, listening to Atkins, who was planning some improvements in the interior so as to add to her comfort.

“I wish I could go with you, Harvey,” said Tessa with a bright smile ; “it would be like the old days in Ponapé, with you and my brothers. How long will you be away ?”

“Perhaps two days. Will you come, Atkins ?”

“Not me ! The less salt water I see and the less rain-water I feel for another week the better I’ll like it. Besides, I’m going to do a bit of carpentering work for Miss Remington. We may have to hang out here for a month before

Tessa

that Dutch schooner comes along, and I'm just going to set to work and make Miss Remington comfy. And if you had any sense, Harvey, you'd stay under shelter instead of trying to get another dose of shakes by going out and fooling around in a canoe.

Harvey laughed. "There's no more fever for me, Atkins. I'm clear of it. That little boat trip of ours has knocked it clean out of my bones, and if you don't believe me, I'm willing to prove it by getting to the top of that coconut-tree outside there in ten seconds' quicker time than you can do it."

The boat voyage had certainly done him good, and although he had by no means thoroughly recovered his strength, his cheeks had lost their yellow, haggard look, and his eyes were bright with returning health. Atkins, who knew that Tessa was to become his wife, looked first at him and then at her with sly humour twinkling in his honest grey eyes. Then he took his pipe out of his pocket and put it in his mouth.

"Well, I'll come back by and by. Two is company, and three is none. The sooner *I* go, the better you'll like it, and the sooner *you* go,

Tessa

Harvey, the sooner I can get to work ;” and so saying he walked out.

Tessa’s dark eyes danced with fun as she walked backwards from Harvey, and leaning against the thatched side of the house, put her finger to her lips. “What a *beautiful*, sensible man he is, isn’t he, Harvey?”

“He’s a man after my own heart, Tessa,” and then Maoni, who sat smoking a cigarette in a corner of the room, discreetly turned her back as certain sibilant sounds were frequently repeated for a minute or two.

“Harvey, you sinner,” she whispered, “I don’t like you a bit. Really and truly I don’t. . . . Now, *now*, no more. . . . Maoni can hear you, I’m sure. The *idea* of your going away for two days—two whole days—and marching calmly up to me and telling me of it in such a rude, matter-of-fact manner. You *are* unkind. . . . *Don’t*. . . . I don’t like you, Harvey . . . I’ll tell father that you went away and left me for two whole days—to go fishing and pig-shooting, and poor Mr. Atkins had to look after me, and . . . oh, Harvey, Harvey, isn’t it lovely! Father will be so glad, and so will Carmela and

Tessa

Jack, and Librada and Ned. Harvey dear, I do hope your sisters will like me. Perhaps they will think I am only a native girl. . . . Oh, *do* be careful, I can see Maoni's back shaking. She *knows* you're kissing me, I'm sure."

"Don't care if she does; don't care if she sees me kissing you, like this, and this, *and* this; don't care if Atkins sees us."

Her low, happy laugh sounded like the trill of a bird. "Harvey dear, do you remember the day when we went to Róan Kiti in Ponapé—when you were sailing the *Belle Brandon* for father?"

Harvey didn't remember, but, like a sensible lover, said he did, and emphasised his remembrance in a proper manner.

"Well, now, listen . . . Oh, you horrid fellow, why do you look at me as if I were a baby! Now, I shan't tell you anything at all. . . . There, don't pretend to be sorry, for you know . . . oh, Harvey dear, I *must* tell you."

"Tell me, dearest."

"That's a good boy, a good would-be-climb-

Tessa

ing-a-coconut-tree youth, who wanted to show off before poor Atkins who told me just now that you were 'the whitest man in the South Seas.' He did really."

"Atkins is 'an excellent good man,' and you are the sweetest and most beautiful girl in *all* the wide, wide Pacific. Come, tell me what it is that you *must* tell me."

"I'll tell you if you don't kiss me any more. Maoni's eyes can see round her shoulders, I believe. I *do wish* she wasn't here. . . . Well, that day when you and I were climbing up the mountain-path you let a branch swing back—you careless thing—and it hit me in the face and hurt me terribly, and you took me up in your arms and kissed me. Oh, Harvey, don't you remember? Kissed me, just because I was crying like a baby. Harvey dear, I was only fourteen then, but I loved you then—that was the real, *very* beginning of it all, I think. And then I went away to school to San Francisco, and *you* went away—and I suppose you never thought one little bit about me again."

"Indeed I did, Tess" (here was a silent but well-employed interlude); "I often thought of

Tessa

you, dear, but not as a lover thinks. For in those days you were to me only a sweet child (if Maoni wasn't here I'd pick you up and nurse you), a sweet, sweet little comrade whose dear, soft eyes used to smile into mine whenever I stepped into your father's house, and——”

“Oh, Harvey, Harvey! I have never, never forgotten you. *There!* and *there!* and *there!* I don't care if Maoni, or any one, or all the world sees me,” and she flung her soft arms round his neck and kissed him again and again in the sheer abandonment of her innocent happiness. “But you really *love* me now, Harvey, don't you? And oh, Harvey dear, where shall we live? And your sisters . . . if they don't like me?”

Harvey stroked her soft hair, and pressed his lips to her cheeks.

“They won't *like* you, Tess. They'll just love you—and they'll make me jealous.”

Again her happy laugh trilled out. “How lovely! . . . Harvey dear?”

“Yes, Tess.”

“I want to tell you something—something

Tessa

that only mother knows, something about me—and a man.”

Harvey looked smilingly into her deep, tender eyes, half-suffused with tears.

“Go ahead, dear.”

“Go ahead, indeed! You rough, rude sailor! Any one would think I was a man by the way you speak to me . . . But, Harvey dear, listen . . . there was a man who wanted to marry me.”

Harvey was all attention at once. “Sit down here, little woman, and tell me who the——”

“Sh! Don’t swear, or I won’t tell you anything, not *anything at all*, about it. . . . Harvey dear, why do you want to go away fishing? Stay here, and help poor Mr. Atkins.”

“Who was the man, Tess?”

“Are you really, really going away for two whole days?”

“I am, sweet.”

“Harvey dear, I’ll tell you all about it. You won’t be angry?”

“All depends. Who was the man?”

His laughing eyes belied his assumed stern-

Tessa

ness of visage, for in her eyes there shone a light so serenely pure that he knew he had naught to dread.

“A very, *very* nice man, sir. Now try and guess who it was?”

“Old Schüler, the fat German trader at Yap.”

“Oh, you wretch, Harvey! He’s been married three times, and has dozens and dozens of all sorts of coloured children. . . . Now there! Guess again or I’ll twist this side of your moustache until I make you cry. . . . Harvey dear, who was the girl whose photograph was over your bunk in father’s schooner?”

“I forget. Most likely it was my sister Kate,” was the prompt reply.

“I don’t believe you, Mr. Harvey Carr. But I’ll find out all about *you* by and by. You’ll have to just tell me *everything*. Now guess again.”

“The captain of the *Lafayette*. He asked each of your sisters to marry him, I know, and I suppose you followed in turn as soon as you began to wear long dresses.”

“That horrible man! We all hated him.

Tessa

No, indeed, it was somebody better than the captain of a whaler."

"Don't be so superior, Tess. Your brother Ned hopes to be skipper of a whaler some day."

"But Ned is very good-looking, and——"

"So was old Ayton before he lost his teeth, and one eye, and began 'ter chaw terbacker' and drink Bourbon by the gallon. . . . Beauty is only skin deep, my child."

"Oh, you, you—I don't know what to call you, but I do know that I have a round turn of your moustache in my hand, and could make you go on your knees if I liked. Now guess again; you're getting 'warmer,' because it—*he* I mean—is a captain. Quick, and don't struggle so. I mean to keep you here just as long as I please."

"Well, then, old Freeman. He's a captain, or was one about a hundred years ago, when he was much younger than he is now." (Freeman was a nongenerian settler on Ponapé and a neighbour of Tessa's father.)

"Don't be so silly! I've a great mind not to tell you at all, but as you haven't whimpered.

Tessa

when I pulled your moustache I *shall* tell you—it—he, I mean—was Captain Reade, of the United States ship *Narrangansett*. Now!”

Then all her raillery vanished in a moment. “He was a great friend of father’s, you know, Harvey; and first he asked father, and father said I was too young, and then when I was leaving school in San Francisco to come home he wrote to me and asked me if he could come and see me. And he did come, and asked me to marry him.”

“And you really didn’t care for him, Tessa?”

“Not a bit. How could I? Harvey, I never, never thought about anybody in the world but you,” and she looked into his face with swimming eyes as he pressed his lips to hers. “There, I’ll let you go now, dear. I can hear Huka and the others coming for you. But Harvey dear, don’t stay away for two whole days.”

An hour after leaving the village the canoes turned aside into a small narrow bay on one of the larger islands. The water was of great

Tessa

depth, from sixty to seventy fathoms, though the bay itself was in no part wider than a hundred yards. A solid wall of coral enclosed it on three sides, rising sheer up from the deep blue, and its surface was now bared and drying fast under the rays of the sun, for the rain had cleared off, and the sky was a vault of unflecked blue once more.

The natives had told Harvey and Roka that this bay was a spot famed as the haunt of a huge species of rock-cod called *pura*, some of which, they said, "took two strong men to lift," and they were greatly pleased when they found that both the white man and Roka knew the *pura* well, and had eagerly assented to Harvey's proposition that they should spend an hour or two in the place, and try and get one or two of the gigantic fish; as they had the necessary tackle—thick, six-plaited lines of coir fibre, with heavy wooden hooks such as are used for shark-fishing by the natives of the equatorial and north-west islands of the Pacific.

Had Harvey and his companions been ten minutes later in turning aside to enter the bay

Tessa

they would have been seen by Chard and Hendry ere they descended the coral mound at the north end of the lagoon, and much of this tale would not have been told. For had the destroyers of poor Oliver and his crew discovered the canoes they probably would at once have launched their boat again, and have put to sea, or at least prepared themselves for an attack. But great events so often come of small things.

For nearly an hour Harvey, Roka, and Huka fished for *pura* from the coral ledges, but without success. They had baited their hooks with flying-fish, as was the practice of the Pikirami people.

“Master,” said Roka presently to Harvey, “never have I had good luck with flying-fish when fishing for *pura* in mine own land of Manhiki. 'Tis a *feke*¹ that the *pura* loveth.”

“Ay, Roka, a *feke* is a good bait for the *pura*, and all those great fish which live deep down in their *fale amu*” (houses of coral). “Let us seek for one on the outer reef. Then we shall return here. It is in my heart to show these our good

¹ Octopus.

Tessa

friends of Pikirami that there is one white man who can catch a *pura*."

Roka showed his white teeth in an approving smile. "Thou art a clever white man, and can do all those things that we brown men can do. Malua hath told me that there is no one like thee in all the world for skill in fishing and many things. Let us go seek *feko*."

The rest of their party—the men from the *Motutapu* and the Pikirami people—were busily employed in preparations for cooking, some making ready an oven of red-hot stones, others putting up fish and chickens in leaf wrappers, and Malua and two Pikirami youths of his own age were husking numbers of young drinking-nuts.

Telling his native friends that he would return in an hour or two, or as soon as he had caught some *feko*, Harvey set off, accompanied by Roka and Huka, the latter carrying a heavy turtle-spear, about five feet in length from the tip of its wide arrow-headed point to the end of the pole of ironwood.

Turning to the eastward, they struck into the cool shade of the narrow strip of forest which

Tessa

clothed the island from the inner lagoon beach to the outer or weather side, and Harvey at once began to search among the small pools on the reef for an octopus, Huka with Roka going on ahead with his turtle-spear. In the course of a quarter of an hour they were out of sight of each other.

For some time Harvey, armed with a light wooden fish-spear, carefully examined the shallow pools as he walked along over the reef, and after he had progressed about a mile he at last saw one of the hideous creatures he sought lying on the white sandy bottom of a circular hole in the reef, its green malevolent eyes looking upward at the intruder. In an instant he thrust the spear through its horrible marbled head, and drew it out upon the rocks, where he proceeded to kill it, a task which took him longer than he anticipated; then carrying it back to the shore, he threw the still quivering monster upon a prominent rock and set out again in search of another, intending to follow his native comrades, who were in hopes of striking a turtle.

As he tramped over the reef, crushing the living, many-coloured coral under his booted

Tessa

feet, his eyes were arrested by some objects lying on the bottom of a deep pool. He bent down and looked carefully—five magnificent orange cowries were clinging closely together upon a large white and sea-worn slab of dead coral.

An exclamation of pleasure escaped from him as he saw the great size and rich colouring of these rare and beautiful shells.

“What a lovely present for Tessa!” he thought; and taking off his shirt he dived into the clear water and brought them up one by one. Then with almost boyish delight he placed them beside him on the reef, and looked at them admiringly.

“Oh you beauties!” he said, passing his hand over their glossy backs; “how delighted Tessa will be! No one else has ever had the luck to find five such shells together. I’m a *tagata manuia lava*,¹ as Malua says.”

He picked the shells up carefully, put them into his wide-brimmed leaf hat, which he then tied up in his shirt, and taking his spear again made towards the shore, too pleased at his good

¹ A man with extraordinary good luck.

Tessa

fortune to trouble any further about another *feko*, and only anxious to let Roka and Huka see his prizes.

Half-way to the shore he paused and looked along the curving line of beach to see if either of them were in sight ; then from behind a vine-covered boulder not fifty yards away a rifle cracked, and he fell forward on his face without a cry.

CHAPTER XII

SOON after they had left Harvey the Manhikian and Huka parted, each preferring to take his own way, Roka laughingly telling his comrade that although he, Roka, had no spear, he would bring back a turtle.

“In my land of Manihiki we trouble not about spears. We dive after the turtle and drag them ashore.”

“Thou boaster,” replied the Savage Islander good-naturedly, as he stepped briskly down the hard, white sand towards the water, his sturdy, reddish-brown body naked to the waist, and his brawny right arm twirling the heavy turtle-spear about his head as if it were a bamboo wand. “I go into the lagoon, whither goest thou?”

Roka pointed ahead. “Along the beach towards the islet with the high trees. May we both be lucky in our fishing.”

Tessa

In a few minutes he was out of sight and hearing of his shipmate, for the beach took a sudden curve round a low, densely-verdured point, on the other side of which it ran in an almost straight line for a mile. Suddenly he paused and shaded his eyes with his hand as he caught sight of a dark object lying on the sand.

"'Tis a boat," he muttered, and in another moment he was speeding towards it. When within a few hundred yards he stopped and then crouched upon his hands and knees, his dark eyes gleaming with excitement.

"It is the captain's boat," he said to himself, as lying flat upon his stomach he dragged himself over the sand into the shelter of the low thicket scrub which fringed the bank at high-water mark. Once there, he stood up, and watched carefully. Then stripping off his clothes and throwing them aside, he sped swiftly along an old native path, which ran parallel to the beach, till he was abreast of the boat. Then he crouched down again and listened. No sound broke the silence except the call of the sea-birds and the drone of the surf upon the reef.

Tessa

He waited patiently, his keen eyes searching and his quick ear listening ; then creeping softly along on his hands and knees again, he examined the sandy soil. In a few minutes his search was rewarded, for he came across the footmarks of Chard and the captain, leading to the vine-covered boulders under the shelter of which they had made their camp. Following these up, he was soon at the place itself, and examining the various articles lying upon the ground—provisions, clothing, the roll of charts, sextant. Leaning against the rocky wall was a Snider carbine. He seized it quickly, opened the breach, and saw that it was loaded ; then he made a hurried search for more cartridges, and found nearly a dozen tied up in a handkerchief with about fifty Winchesters. These latter he quickly buried in the sand, and then with his eyes alight with the joy of savage expectancy of revenge, he again sought and found the tracks of the two men, which led in the very direction from which he had come.

To a man like Roka there was no difficulty in following the line which Hendry and the supercargo had taken ; their footsteps showed

Tessa

deep in the soft, sandy soil, rendered the more impressionable by the heavy downfall of rain a few hours before. And even had they left no traces underfoot of their progress, the countless broken branches and vines which they had pushed or torn aside on their way through the forest were a sure guide to one of Nature's children, whose pursuit was quickened by his desire for vengeance upon the murderers of his brother and his shipmates.

Pushing his way through a dense strip of the tough, thorny scrub called *ngiia*, he suddenly emerged into the open once more—on the weather side of the island. First his eye ran along the sand to discover which way the footsteps trended ; they led southwards towards a low, rugged boulder whose sides and summit were thickly clothed with a thick, fleshy-leaved creeper. Beyond that lay the bare expanse of reef, along which he saw Harvey Carr was walking towards the shore, unconscious of danger. And right in his line of vision he saw Chard, who, kneeling amid the foliage of the boulder, was covering Harvey with his rifle ; in another instant the supercargo had fired.

Tessa

Roka dropped on one knee and raised his Snider carbine, just as Sam Chard turned to Hendry with a smile upon his handsome, evil face, and waved his hand mockingly towards the prone figure of Harvey.

“That’s one more to the good, Louis——” he began, when Roka’s carbine rang out, and the supercargo spun round, staggering, and then fell upon his hands and knees, with the blood gushing in torrents from his mouth.

Hendry, taking no heed of anything but his own safety, dashed into the undergrowth and disappeared.

Running past Chard, rifle in hand, the Manhikian launched a curse at the groaning man, who heard him not in his agony. Leaping from pool to pool over the rough, jagged coral, which cut and tore his feet and legs, the seaman sprang to Harvey’s aid, and a hoarse sob of joy burst from him when he saw that he was not dead.

“My thigh is broken, Roka. Carry me to the shore quickly, and then haste, haste, good Roka, and warn the others. These men of Pikirami are traitors. Haste thee, dear friend,

Tessa

if ye be a good man and true, and help to save the woman who is dear to me.”

Tearing off the sleeves of Harvey's shirt, Roka, as he answered, bound them tightly over the wound to stay the flow of blood. “Nay, master, 'tis not the men of Pikirami. 'Tis the captain and the *tuhi tuhi*¹ who have done this to thee. Nay, question me no more . . . so, gently, let me lift thee.”

He raised Harvey up in his mighty arms as if he were a child, his right hand still grasping the Snider carbine, and carried him carefully to the beach. There he laid him down for a while.

“Stay not here with me, Roka of Manhiki,” said Harvey, trying hard to speak calmly, though he was suffering the greatest agony from his wound—“stay not here, but run, run quickly, so that there may be no more murder done. Leave me here. . . . Tell the *sua alii*² to get the people together and hunt and slay those two men. Give them no mercy.”

¹ *I.e.*, one who writes—a supercargo or clerk.

² The mate, chief officer—one next in command to a captain.

Tessa

“No mercy shall they have,” said the Manhikian grimly; “so rest thee content for a little while. . . . *Sue!*”

He sprang to his feet, carbine in hand, for from out the thickset jungle there emerged a thing of horror to look upon.

Chard, leaning upon his Winchester, was staggering down to the beach, with his lower jaw shot away. He came blindly on towards the man he had sought to murder, gasping and groaning. Then he saw Roka, dropped his Winchester, threw up his hands, and tried to speak.

Roka walked up to him.

“’Tis better for thee to die quickly,” he said.

The supercargo swayed to and fro, and mutely held out both hands to Harvey as if imploring help or forgiveness.

Roka drew back, and planted his left foot firmly in the sand, as he placed the muzzle of his carbine against Chard’s breast, and Chard, grasping the barrel in his left hand to steady himself, bent his dreadful face upon his chest.

Tessa

As the loud report reverberated through the leafy forest aisles there came the sound of rushing feet, and Malua and the rest of the crew of the *Motutapu*, together with the six Pikirami natives, burst through the undergrowth, and gazed in wonder at the scene before them—Harvey lying on the sand, Roka with his still-smoking rifle in his hand, standing over the dead body of Chard.

Too weak from loss of blood to answer Malua's weeping inquiries, Harvey yet managed to smile at him, and indicate Roka by a wave of his hand. Then the Manhikian spoke.

"No time is there now to tell ye all. Run back, some of ye, to the *sua alii* Atkins, and tell him that I have killed the man Chard, but that the captain hath escaped. Get thee each a rifle and follow him. He hath fled towards his boat, which lieth on the little island with the high trees. Follow, follow quickly, lest he drag the boat into the water and sail away. Slay him. Let his blood run out. And tell the *sua alii* Atkins and the white girl that Harfi hath been sorely hurt, but is well,

Tessa

and will not die, for it is but a broken bone.”

Five or six men darted off, while the rest, under Roka's directions, quickly made a litter for Harvey, and placed him upon it.

“Art thou in pain, master?” asked the giant Manhikian tenderly, as the bearers lifted the wounded man.

“Ay, but let me smoke so that the pain may go. And one of ye go to where I fell on the reef and bring me the five *pule*,¹ lest when the tide cometh in they be lost.”

Roka himself ran off, picked up the hat and shells and brought them back; then he gave the word to march.

Half-way through the forest they were met by Atkins and Tessa, who were accompanied by the entire population of the village, except those of the young men who had set off in pursuit of Hendry.

“I'm all right, Tessa,” said Harvey; “it's only a broken bone. Atkins, old man, don't look so worried. You can set it easily enough. Good man, you've brought some rum, I see,

¹ Cowries.

Tessa

and 'I willna say no,' as poor Morrison used to say."

Atkins, whose hand was shaking with excitement, for he thought that perhaps Harvey was mortally wounded and was only assuming cheerfulness, gave him a stiff tot of rum.

"Here's luck to you, Atkins. Tessa dear, don't cry. Atkins will fix me up in a brace of shakes as soon as we get to the village. And look here, Tess. See what I found upon the reef."

Long before sunset Harvey was sleeping quietly in the head-man's house, with Tessa and Maoni watching beside him. Atkins had carefully set the broken limb with broad splints of coconut-spathe; and, proud and satisfied with his work, was pacing to and fro outside the house, smoking his pipe.

Presently Latour and Malua appeared, and the Frenchman beckoned to the second mate.

"What is it, steward?"

"Huka has just come back, sir. He wants to see you. The captain is dead."

"Thank God for that. Where did they get him?"

Tessa

“Huka will tell you, sir. Here he is.”

The Savage Islander stepped forward, and raised his hand in salute, with a smile of pride upon his lips.

“I been kill him,” he said in his broken English; “I was come along back to meet Mr. Harvey, when I hear the guns. And then I see the captain come, running quick. He have Winchester in his hand, and when he see me he stop. He fire two, three times at me. Then I run up to him, and I drive my turtle spear through him, and he fall down and I put my foot on his mouth, and he die.”

Atkins slapped him on the shoulder. “Good man you, Huka! Stay here a moment, and I’ll bring you a big drink of rum. Then we must go and bury both the swine.”

Three weeks later the *Sikiana* sailed into the lagoon, and the “good little Dutch skipper,” of whom Harvey had spoken, had him brought on board and placed in his bunk for the voyage to Ponapé.

“My tear Mees Tessa,” he said, “Mr. Carr haf dold me dat your fader vill gif me five

Tessa

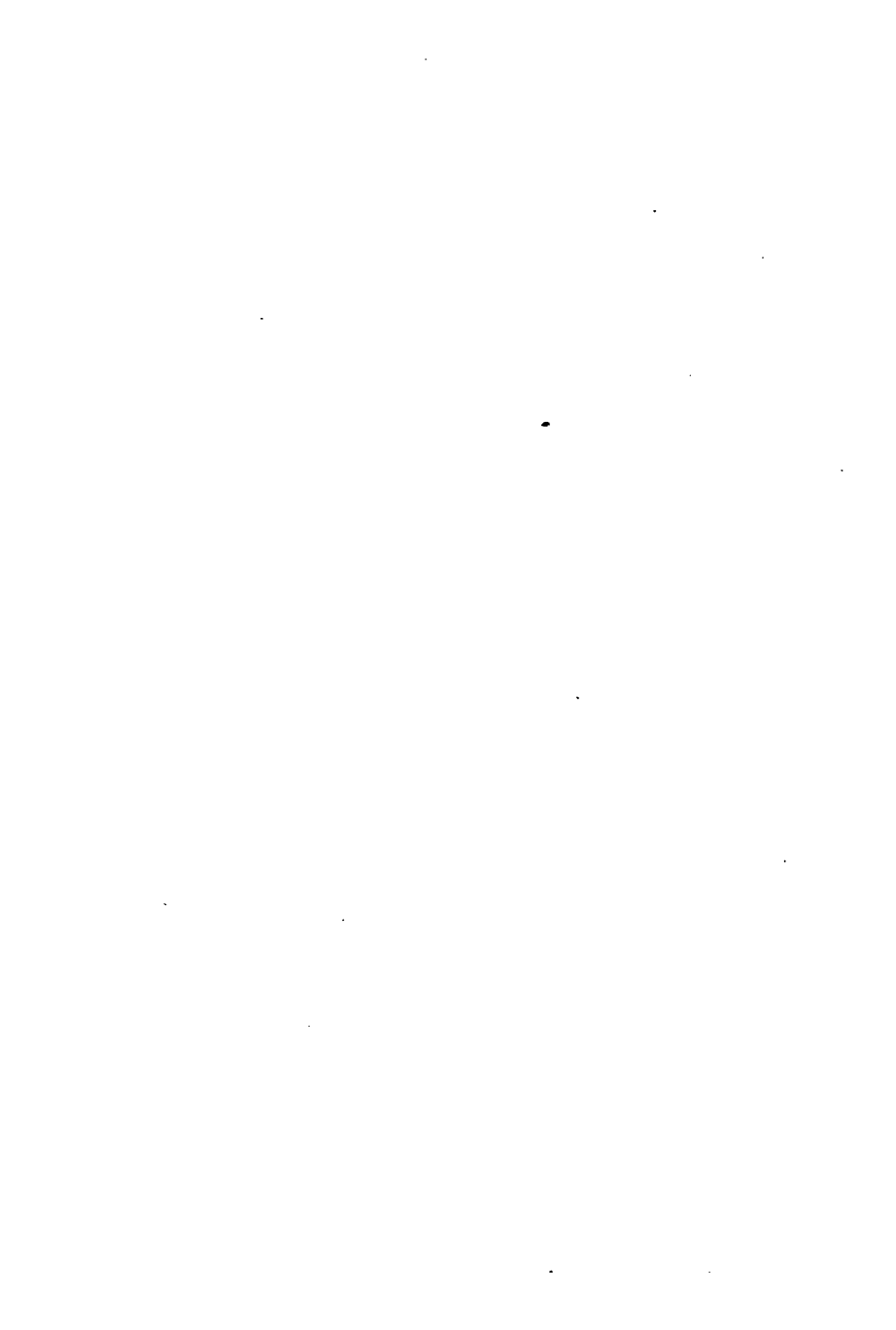
hundred dollar ven ve get to Ponapé. If der *Sikiana* vas mein own ship I vould dake you und Mr. Carr and der second mate und all your natives to Ponapé for nodings ; for your fader vas a good man to me, und Harvey Carr vas a good man to me ven I sailed mit him in the *Belle Brandon*. But you must invide old Westphalen to the wedding."

"Indeed we shall, captain."

"And me too, miss?" asked Atkins, with a sly twinkle in his eye.

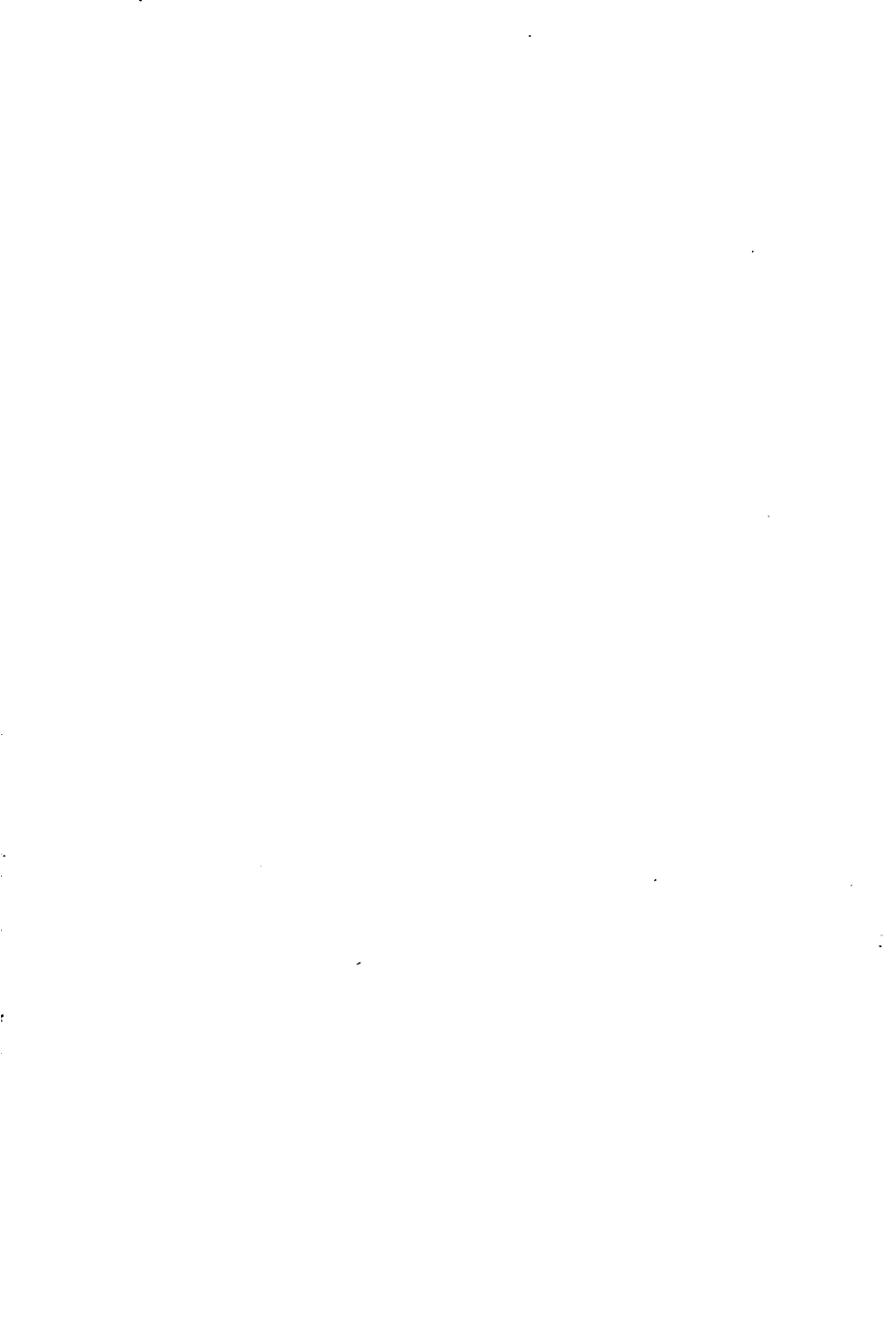
"And you too, of course, dear, dear Atkins, so good, brave, and true. There, look, Harvey, I am going to kiss Mr. Atkins."

"God bless you both, miss," said the mate huskily.





THE TRADER'S WIFE



CHAPTER I

BRABANT'S wife was sitting on the shady verandah of her house on the hills overlooking Levuka harbour, and watching a large fore and aft schooner being towed in by two boats, for the wind had died away early in the morning and left the smooth sea to swelter and steam under a sky of brass.

The schooner was named the *Maritana*, and was owned and commanded by Mrs. Brabant's husband, John Brabant, who at that moment was standing on the after-deck looking through his glasses at the house on the hill, and at the white-robed figure of his wife.

"Can you see Mrs. Brabant, sir?" asked the chief mate, a short, dark-faced man of about thirty years of age, as he came aft and stood beside his captain.

"Yes, I can see her quite plainly, Lester," he

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replied, as he handed the glasses to his officer ;
“ she is sitting on the verandah watching us.”

The mate took the glasses and directed them upon the house for a few moments. “ Perhaps she will come off to us, sir ? ”

Brabant shook his head. “ It is a terribly hot day, you see, Lester, and she can't stand the sun at all. And then we shall be at anchor in another hour or so.”

“ Just so, sir,” replied the mate politely. He did not like Mrs. Brabant, had never liked her from the very first day he saw her a year before, when Brabant had brought her down on board the *Maritana* in Auckland, and introduced her as his future wife. Why he did not like her he could not tell, and did not waste time in trying to analyse his feelings. He knew that his old friend and shipmate was passionately fond of his fair young wife, and was intensely proud of her beauty, and now, at the conclusion of a wearisome five months' voyage among the sun-baked islands of the Equatorial Pacific, was returning home more in love with her than ever. Not that he ever talked of her effusively, even to Lester, tried and true comrade as he was, for Brabant

The Trader's Wife

was naturally a self-contained and somewhat reserved man, as one could tell by his deep-set, stern grey eyes, and square jaw and chin.

“Damn her!” muttered Lester to himself, as he stood on the topgallant foc’sle watching the two boats with their toiling crews of brown-skinned natives; “nearly five months since she last saw him, and there she sits calmly watching us as if we had only sailed yesterday. Afraid of the sun! She’s too selfish and too frightened of spoiling her pretty pink-and-white skin—that’s what it is.”

An hour later the boats came alongside, and then, as the chain rattled through the hawse-pipes, Brabant came on deck dressed in a suit of spotless white.

“Shall we see you this evening, Jim?” he asked, as he stood waiting to receive the Customs officer and doctor, whose boats were approaching.

“Thank you very much, sir, but I would rather stay on board this evening, as Dr. Bruce is sure to come into town some time to-day, as soon as he hears the *Maritana* is here, and I should not like to miss him.”

The Trader's Wife

“Just as you please, Jim. But why not take a run on shore with him, and both of you come up for an hour or two after dinner?”

The mate nodded. “Yes, we could do that, I think; but at the same time, Mrs. Brabant won't much care about visitors this evening, I'm afraid.”

“My wife will be only too delighted, Jim,” replied the captain in his grave manner; “you and Bruce are my oldest friends—that is quite enough for her.”

The port doctor and Customs officer came on board and warmly greeted the captain of the *Maritana*, for, apart from his being one of the wealthiest traders in the South Seas, John Brabant was essentially a man who made friends—made them insensibly, and then his beautiful young wife was the acknowledged belle of the small European community in Fiji, and his house, when he returned from one of his trading voyages, was literally an open house, for every one—traders, storekeepers, cotton planters, naval men or merchant skippers—knew there was a welcome awaiting them in the big bungalow on the hillside at whatever time they

The Trader's Wife

called, day or night. Such hospitality was customary in those old Fijian days, when every cotton planter saw before him the shining portals of the City of Fortune inviting him to enter and be rich, and every trader and trading captain made money so easily that it was hard to spend it as quickly as it was made ; and Manton's Hotel on Levuka beach was filled night after night with crowds of hilarious and excited people, and the popping of the champagne corks went on from dusk till dawn of the tropic day, and men talked and drank and talked and drank again, and told each other of the lucky strokes they had made ; and sun-tanned skippers from the wild and murderous Solomons and the fever-stricken New Hebrides spoke of the cargoes of "blackbirds" they had sold at two hundred and fifty dollars a head, and dashed down a handful of yellow sovereigns on Manton's bar "for a drink all round." And then, sometimes, a long snaky-looking brigantine, with the name *Atlantic* on her stern, and the Stars and Stripes flying from her gaff, would sail into the noisy little port nestling under the verdured hills of Ovalau Island, and a big man,

The 'Trader's Wife

with a black, flowing beard, and a deep but merry voice, would be rowed ashore by a crew of wild-eyed, brown-skinned Polynesians, and " 'Bully' Hayes has come! 'Bully' Hayes has come!" would be cried from one end of Levuka to the other, as every one, white, black, and brown, ran to the beach to see the famous and much-maligned "pirate" land, with a smile on his handsome face, his pockets full of gold, and he himself ready for anything or everything—a *liaison* with some other man's wife, a story of his last cruise, a fight "for love" with some recently discovered pugilist of local renown; a sentimental Spanish song to the strumming of his guitar; or the reading of the burial service according to the rites of either the Roman Catholic Church, or that of the Church of England, over the remains of some acquaintance or stranger who had succumbed to fever or a bullet, or Levuka whiskey. Brave, halcyon days were those, when men lived their lives quickly, and then disappeared or were ruined, or committed suicide, and were soon forgotten.

The Trader's Wife

Brabant had gone ashore, and Lester and the second mate—a thin, sallow-faced Chileno named Diaz—were seated under the awning, smoking, and occasionally watching the progress of a small cutter which was about a mile distant, and under the influence of a light air which had sprung up, was heading towards the *Maritana*. She was owned by Dr. Bruce, a planter friend of Lester. His estate was some miles down the coast, and he had been an old shipmate of Lester's ten years before, when Brabant was living in Samoa as manager of the American Plantation Company, and Lester had first made his acquaintance—an acquaintance which had resulted in a firm and lasting friendship. Brabant wanted an overseer—a man who understood the native language—and Lester, then a youth of twenty, and idling about Samoa, waiting a berth as second mate, had been sent to him by an old seafaring friend. For three years they had worked together, and then Brabant, having saved enough money, threw up his shore berth and bought the *Maritana* to resume his former vocation of trader, and took Lester with him as mate, and

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Diaz, who had also been employed on the plantation, as second mate. That was seven years ago, and the schooner, during that time, had traversed the Pacific from one end to the other over and over again. Sometimes Brabant would take his cargo to San Francisco, sometimes to Singapore, and at rare intervals to Auckland. During one of his ship's visits to Fiji his chief mate found his old friend Bruce settled there as a planter, and Bruce had induced Brabant to make Fiji his head-quarters. So he bought land and built a house, and then, a year before the opening of this story, brought a wife to rule over it, much to the surprise and delight of the white residents of Levuka and the group generally, for John Brabant had always been looked upon as a man whose soul was wrapped up in his extensive business, and as a woman hater. This latter conclusion was arrived at from purely deductive reasoning—he despised and loathed the current idea that living in the South Seas palliated the most glaring licentiousness, and permitted a man to “do as he liked.” Therefore he had been set down as a non-marrying man—“an awfully

The Trader's Wife

good fellow, but with queer ideas, you know," his many friends would say, and "Bully" Hayes, who knew him well, said that John Brabant was the only clean-living, single man in Fiji, and that if he ever did marry his wife would be "some bony Scotch person of about forty, with her hair screwed up into a Turk's knot at the back of her long head, and with a cold, steely eye like a gimlet. Nine out of ten of good fellows like Jack Brabant do get mated with ghastly wives."

So when the *Maritana* one day sailed into Levuka harbour, and Brabant brought his young wife ashore, the community simply gasped in pleased astonishment, and even the exclusive wives of the leading merchants and planters made haste to call on Mrs. Brabant when they saw in the marriage announcement, published in the Auckland *Herald*, that she was "a daughter of the late General Deighton Ransome, Commander-in-Chief of the Straits Settlements," etc.

In a few months Mrs. Brabant was equally the best-liked and best-hated woman in Fiji—the men paying her the most undivided atten-

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tion, because she liked it and was Brabant's wife, and the women hating her because she would be, at times, languidly insolent to them, and practically monopolised even the attentions of the naval officers when a dance was given. That nine out of ten of her lady friends detested her merely afforded her secret pleasure—secret, that is, so far as her husband went, for she feared but one thing in the world, and that was that John Brabant would discover her true and worthless nature.

For some minutes the two mates smoked on in silence, then Diaz made a backward gesture towards the bungalow on the hills: "Are you going there to-night?"

Lester nodded. "I think so. He asked me, you see."

The Chileno remained silent for a minute or so, then said, "She is the most beautiful fair woman I have ever seen."

Again Lester nodded, but made no remark. He was well aware that Pedro Diaz shared his dislike for the captain's wife, though he had never openly said so. The Chileno, morose and grim as he was, was intensely devoted to

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Brabant, who had twice saved his life—once under a heavy rifle fire in the Solomon Islands, when Diaz and his boat's crew were all but cut off and massacred by the natives, and Brabant came out of the fray with a broken arm and a bullet through his shoulder ; and once at sea, when he was knocked overboard by the parting of a boom guy, and his captain sprang overboard after him, though the night was as dark as pitch, and the *Maritana* was like to have been smothered by the heavy, lumping seas which fell upon her decks when she was brought to.

“ He is a doomed man,” resumed the second mate presently, with a sullen yet emphatic tone ; “ that woman will be his doom. She is beautiful, and as false as she is beautiful. *I* can see it in her eyes ; *he* cannot see. But were I in his place I should not leave her alone. She is not to be trusted.”

Lester thought the same, but said nothing, and he and Diaz rose and went on the main deck to welcome Bruce, whose cutter was now coming alongside.

“ How are you, Jim ? How are you, Mr.

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Diaz?" said the doctor, a big, bronzed-faced Scotsman with kindly blue eyes, as he sprang over the side and shook hands with them. "I saw the *Maritana* early this morning in tow of the boats, so I started off in the cutter at once. Brabant gone ashore?"

"Yes, about an hour ago," replied the chief mate. "Almost a newly-married man, you see," he added, with a laugh.

Dr. Bruce gave his friend a quick, penetrating glance, but there was no answering smile on his lips. He knew Brabant well, and knew of Mrs. Brabant more than did her husband.

The three men sat down under the awning for nearly an hour, smoking and drinking their whiskey-and-soda, and talking freely together. Bruce—much the oldest man of the three—was aware that both his companions were devoted to Brabant, and knew him far better than himself, and so, being a straightforward, purposeful man, he said what he had to say about Mrs. Brabant in very plain language.

"You, Jim, *can* and ought to give him a hint. *I can't*. If I did he would most likely haul off and knock me down. But he ought

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to stay ashore this time. She may be only a brainless little fool of a flirt, but there's a lot of talk about her, especially since that young sweep of a Danvers came here."

"Who is he?" asked Lester.

Dr. Bruce leant back in his seat, and flicked the ash off his cigar. "He's the manager of the new Land and Trading Company here—a little, pretty-faced fellow, with a yellow moustache, curly hair, and as much principle in him as a damned rat. He has the command of any amount of money, and the women here think no end of him. Was in the army—Rifles, I think—but believe, though I can't be sure of it, was kicked out. Thorough beast, but just the kind of man to get along too well with women who don't know him. Now I'll take another whiskey-and-soda after thus traducing Mr. Danvers, who I'm perfectly willing to boot along Levuka beach from one end to the other if he gives me a chance to do it on my own account. And, by Jove, I'll give him a chance to-night."

"Where?" asked Pedro Diaz, with a gleam of sombre light in his dark eyes.

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“At Manton's. He's sure to come in there about eleven to-night. Goodbye for the present. I'll meet you there about eight.”

As the doctor went over the side again the Chilian turned to Lester.

“What did I tell you?” he said gloomily.

CHAPTER II

AT five o'clock in the afternoon, as Dr. Bruce was seated on the wide verandah of Manton's Hotel, smoking his pipe, and wondering in a lazy sort of a way whether Brabant would hear any of the current scandal about his wife and Danvers, the voice of the latter person broke in upon his musings.

"Hallo, Bruce, how are you?" he exclaimed genially as he sprang up the steps, and extended his hand to the doctor; "I see that Brabant is back."

Bruce answered him curtly enough. "Yes; but you don't know him, do you?"

Danvers clasped his hands over one knee and leant back in his chair. "No; but I see Mrs. Brabant a good deal, and naturally should like to meet her husband. You know him pretty well, don't you?"

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“Yes, I do—have known him for nearly ten years.” Then he moved his chair slightly so that he might face Danvers. He was not an impulsive man, but as he looked into Danvers’s smiling, handsome face the dislike he had always felt towards him, and his keen regard for Brabant, urged him to speak on the subject that was uppermost in his mind, there and then.

“I’m glad I have met you, Captain Danvers,” he said quietly, “as I particularly wished to speak to you about a certain matter, and, as you know, I am not often in town.”

“Certainly, my dear fellow. What is it?”

“Your question to me just now saves me a lot of explanation. You asked me if I knew Brabant, and I told you that I have known him for ten years. And I must tell you further that he is a man for whom I have the deepest regard and respect. Therefore,” and he emphasised the “therefore,” “you can of course guess the nature of the matter upon which I wish to speak with you.”

“’Pon my soul, I can’t,” and Danvers ele-

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vated his eyebrows in pretended astonishment, though his face flushed as he met the doctor's steady, unnerving glance.

Still keeping his eyes on Danvers's face, Bruce went on: "Brabant is a valued friend of mine. He is as unsuspecting and confiding a man as ever lived, but he is a dangerous man to be trifled with. Do you understand me?"

"I'm hanged if I do," replied Danvers, though the angry flash of his clear blue eyes belied his words; "what are you driving at? Just say in plain words what you have to say, and be done with it."

"Right. Plain words. And as few as possible. You have paid Mrs. Brabant such attention that her husband is like to hear of it. Isn't that enough?"

Danvers laughed insolently. "Enough to show me that you are meddling with affairs which do not concern you; Dr. Bruce. I rather imagine that the lady's husband would be the proper person to resent any undue attention being paid by me to his wife—which I deny—than you. Did he commission you to speak to me? I've heard that the Brabant

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family have always had a strain of insanity running through it."

Bruce started. He knew that what Danvers had said was perfectly true, but had thought that he himself was the one man in Fiji who did know. Brabant had himself told him that several of his family on the father's side had "gone a bit wrong," as he put it.

The contemptuous tone of Danvers stung him to the quick.

"That's a beastly thing to say of a man whose house you visit almost daily—and visit when you have never even met him. You must have been brought up in a blackguardly school."

Danvers sprang to his feet with blazing eyes. "You want to pick a quarrel with me. Very good. I'm your man."

"That's where you are wrong. I don't want to quarrel with you. I wish to warn you. And I tell you again that John Brabant is a dangerous man."

"Are you his deputy? What right have you to interfere in my private affairs?"

"I'm not his deputy; and my interference,

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if you like to so call it, will certainly save you from a well-deserved kicking. Don't, don't, don't! No heroics with me, my boy. You haven't a clean record, and *I* know *why* you left the army. Now listen to me. Just put a stop to this business. If you don't, I'll tell both Mrs. Brabant and her husband in your presence that you are not altogether the right sort of man to be accepted as a friend—especially by a young and utterly unsuspecting woman.”

Danvers sank back into his seat, white with passion, as Bruce went on relentlessly.

“And I'll tell what I do know of you to every planter and decent white man in the group. I'll make Fiji too hot for you, and your business will go to the deuce. Now, let us have an understanding. Will you put an end to this dallying about after another man's wife? You can do the thing properly, pay a call or two at the house whilst Brabant is at home, and accept general invitations if you like; but——”

“But what?” Danvers's voice was hoarse with suppressed fury.

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"Stop visiting Mrs. Brabant whilst her husband is away. No gentleman would act as you have acted. You know what a place this is for scandal. And I believe you have as much of the fool as the *roué* in your mental composition."

"And if I decline to entertain your infernal——"

"Steady. No language, please. If you decline to make me that promise here on the spot, I shall do what I have said—tell husband and wife that you're not the kind of man to receive as a friend."

"And by Heavens, I'll shoot you like a rat."

The doctor rose to his feet, and the two men faced each other—the one outwardly calm and collected, the other shaking with passion.

"What is it to be, Captain Danvers?"

"This, you sneaking Scotch sawbones!" and raising his cane Danvers struck the elder man a savage blow across the face.

In another moment Bruce had closed with him, wrenched the cane from his hand, and

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drawing back struck him between the eyes with such force that he was sent flying backwards off the verandah, to fall heavily upon the shrubs of the garden beneath, where he lay huddled up in a heap.

A score of people—white and coloured—rushed to the spot. Bruce, carefully standing the cane against the side of the lounge on which he had been reclining, walked down the steps and pushed his way into the little crowd surrounding the fallen man.

“Let me look at him,” he said, with grim humour, “as a medical man. I’m afraid I’ve hurt him more than I intended.”

The landlord joined them. “What is the matter, Doctor?”

“Nothing serious, Manton. Ye see, Captain Danvers rang that old gag on me about a surgical operation being necessary for a Scotsman to understand a joke; then I lost my temper and called him a fool, and he tickled me with his cane across my face, and I hit him harder than I intended. But he’ll be all right soon. He’s only stunned. Carry him into his room.”

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Manton knew his business. "Just so, Doctor. I'll see to him. But he's given you a fearful bruise on your cheek."

"A mere trifle, Manton," and then without another word he returned to his seat on the lounge, not altogether satisfied with what had happened, and hoping that Danvers would at least have sense enough to corroborate the story he had told Manton as to the cause of the quarrel.

Between seven and eight o'clock Lester and Pedro Diaz came ashore, the *Maritana* being left in charge of the boatswain. By the judicious application of a strip of fresh goat's meat the long bruise on the doctor's cheek had almost disappeared, and he was in his usual placid mood.

"We're a bit too late," remarked Lester, with a laugh, as he and Diaz shook hands; "why couldn't you wait? We heard that you had thrown the new chum Danvers over the verandah an hour or two ago."

Bruce told them the story. "Just as well, Jim. I think he'll take a plain hint that he's sailing on the wrong tack. He went away

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from here as soon as he came to, and I think will have sense enough to keep away. Of course there'll be a lot of talk about the row, and Brabant is sure to have already heard of it, but we must stick to the surgical operation yarn. Now settle yourselves for a chat. Touch that bell there."

As the three smoked and talked a pretty Samoan girl appeared on the verandah, holding a note in her hand. She was Mrs. Brabant's maid, and the note was directed to Lester, bidding him, the doctor, and Pedro come up. It was written by Mrs. Brabant herself.

"We must go, Bruce. Your face doesn't look much the worse. Come on."

The walk to Brabant's bungalow took but a few minutes, and both the captain of the *Maritana* and his wife met them at the gate; Brabant looking supremely happy in his quiet way. His wife, however, Bruce at once saw, seemed pale, and spoke her greetings in a hurried, nervous manner, very unlike her usual self.

"What's all the row been about, Bruce?" said Brabant, as they seated themselves on the

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wide, airy sitting-room. "We heard of it quick enough, I can tell you. My wife seems rather distressed about it, as she quite expected Captain Danvers to call this evening, and I'd like to make his acquaintance."

Bruce gave Mrs. Brabant one swift, sweeping glance which filled her with an undefined terror. Then he laughed.

"Just nothing at all. We quarrelled over what was simply a trifling matter to him, but a good deal to older men like you and I, and that's the whole thing. Now tell me all about the voyage of the *Maritana*."

Brabant saw that there was something beneath the surface, so at once did begin to talk about his voyage; and presently some other people—men and women—dropped in, and the conversation became general, and about ten o'clock Mrs. Brabant, under the plea of a bad headache, bade her guests good-night. She shook hands with some gracious words with Lester and the second mate, but, much to her husband's distress, simply bowed coldly to his friend Bruce, and ignored his proffered hand. The honest, loyal-hearted Scotsman flushed to the

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roots of his hair, but pretended not to notice the slight.

Long after midnight, when all his guests except Bruce and Lester and his fellow-officer had gone home, Brabant and they walked to and fro under the coco-palms which surrounded the bungalow. Brabant talked most. He was full of future trading schemes, and outlined his plans to his two officers freely.

“It's a bit awkward this affair happening between you and Danvers,” he said to Bruce, “for I've had letters from his principals in Sydney which possibly points to a combination of their business and mine as one company, with myself at the head of affairs.”

“My row with Danvers won't affect that, Brabant. I know that he represents people in Australia with any amount of money at their backs, and you are the one man in the Pacific to make a 'combine,' as the Yankees say, and found a trading company that will wipe the Germans out of the Pacific. But, apart from business, don't have anything to do with Danvers. He's no good.”

“No good?”

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“Not a straight man outside of business—not to be trusted. You can tell him I said this of him if you care to do so.”

Brabant stopped in his walk, and Lester and Pedro Diaz drew aside a little.

“There must be something wrong about him, Bruce, else I am sure you would not speak as you do. We four are all old friends. Speak freely.”

“That’s just the thing I cannot do, Brabant. I don’t like him, and can only repeat what I have said just now—he’s not a straight man—not a man I would bring into my house as a *friend!* Now I must be going. Good-night, old fellow. I’m off again to my place in the morning.”

Brabant took his outstretched hand. “Good-night, Bruce. I wish there were more outspoken men like you in the world. *I understand.*”

He spoke the last two words with such a look in his deep-set eyes, that Bruce felt that he did at least understand that Captain Danvers was not a man to be trusted—outside of business matters.

CHAPTER III

ABOUT a week after Dr. Bruce had returned to his plantation Brabant and his wife were talking in their dining-room, from the wide-open windows of which the little harbour of Levuka lay basking in the fervid glow of the westering sun.

Pipe in mouth, and with a smile on his bronzed, rugged face, Brabant was scanning a heap of accounts which were lying on the table. His wife, seated in an easy-chair near the window, fanned herself languidly.

“You’ve spent a lot of money, Nell, in five months—nearly a thousand pounds. Two hundred a month is a big item to a man in my position.”

“But you are very well off, Jack. You told me yesterday that you will clear three thousand pounds from this last voyage.”

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She spoke in a petulant, irritated manner, and her brows drew together as she looked out over the sea.

“Just so, my dear girl; but we cannot afford to live at such a rate as two hundred pounds a month.”

“I have entertained a great many people.” This was said with a sullen inflexion in her voice.

“So I see, Nell. But you need not have done so. We don't want such a lot of visitors.”

“It is all very well for you to talk like that, Jack, but you must remember that I have to keep myself alive in this wretched place whilst you are away.”

Brabant turned his deep-set eyes upon her. “Did you find it so very dull then, Nell?”

“Yes, I did. I hate the place, and hate the people, and so I suppose I spent more of your money than I should have done had I been living anywhere else.”

“Don't say '*your* money,' Nell. I am only too happy to know that I am able to meet all these bills, heavy as they are; and I want you to enjoy yourself as much as possible. But we cannot spend money at this rate, my girl.”

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He spoke with a certain grave tenderness that only served to irritate her.

“Am I to live here like the wife of one of the common shopkeepers on the beach—see no one, go out nowhere?”

“As my wife, Nell, I expect you to go out a good deal, and see a lot of people. It gives me pleasure to know that the people here like you, and that you have given all these dances and things. But, Nell, my dear, don't be so lavish. After all, I am only a trader, and it seems rather absurd for us to spend more money than any one else does in the matter of entertaining people who, after all, are merely acquaintances. You see, Nell, I want to make money, make it as quickly as I can, so that we can go home to the old country and settle down. But we can't do it if we live at the rate of two hundred pounds a month.”

“But if you amalgamate your business with that of Captain Danvers's company, you will make £25,000.”

“But I may not amalgamate with Captain Danvers's company, Nell. I am quite satisfied that they can pay me the £25,000, but I am

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not satisfied as to the *bonâ-fides* of the company. Danvers himself admitted to me that it is proposed to float the new company in London at a figure which represents four times the value of my own and his own company's properties. I don't like it, Nell. My business as it stands I could sell to the Germans for £20,000, cash down. But I won't associate myself with an enterprise that is not absolutely fair and square, for the sake of an extra £5,000."

"I suppose Dr. Bruce has prejudiced you against Captain Danvers."

"Bruce! No, certainly not, Nell. Why should he? Bruce has nothing to do with the thing. He quarrelled with Danvers over some matter that has nothing to do with me, and Danvers got the worst of it. Certainly, however, before I decide to sell my business to Danvers's company I shall consult Bruce."

"Why consult him?"

"Because he is a man in whose business judgment I have great faith. And he's an honest man."

"And you think Captain Danvers is not?"

"Not at all. But I do think that Captain

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Danvers attaches an exaggerated value to the prospects of the new trading company. He's very young, you see, Nell, and takes too rosy a view of everything. And I'd rather die in poverty than be the indirect means of making money at the expense of other people. I'm old-fashioned Nell, and when I die, I want to die with the knowledge that I have left a clean sheet behind me."

Nell Brabant rose with an angry light in her eyes. "I hate talking about money and such horrid things. But I do hope you will come to terms with Captain Danvers and his company."

"Wait a moment, Nell. I want to tell you something which I think will please you. Would you like a trip to Sydney?"

"Very much indeed," she answered, with sudden graciousness.

"Well, I'm thinking of sending the *Maritana* there, to be docked and to be overhauled, with Lester in command. Then whilst you are away I shall charter the *Loelia*, cutter, and make a trip through the Line Islands. You will have at least two months in Sydney, and

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Lester will take good care of you on the voyage."

"It will be a nice change for me, Jack? But why cannot you come?"

"I must make this cruise through the Line Islands before I decide to sell out to Danvers's company."

That evening Brabant announced his plans to his chief officer, and a week later both the *Maritana* and the *Loelia* were ready for sea. During this time Captain Danvers was an occasional visitor to the bungalow on the hill, but he and Brabant met very frequently in the town to discuss business together, and it soon became known that the latter either intended to sell out to, or amalgamate with, the Danvers company.

Ten days before the *Maritana* left Brabant bade his wife goodbye, for the *Loelia* was to sail first. He kissed her but once, and looked so searchingly into her eyes as he held her hand that every vestige of colour left her cheeks.

"You must try and enjoy yourself," he said. "Minea" (her Samoan maid) "and you will be very comfortable on board. You'll have the

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entire cabin to yourselves, as Lester will take up his quarters in the deck-house."

Half an hour later he was giving Lester his final instructions.

"You will not leave Sydney till either you hear from me or see me. I may follow you in the *Loelia* in a month. But no one else is to know this—not even Mrs. Brabant."

"You may depend on me," replied Lester.

"I know it well. Goodbye, Lester."

That evening the *Loelia* sailed from Levuka. Pedro Diaz had been transferred from the *Maritana*, and was now mate of the cutter.

As night came on, and the green hills of Ovalau Island changed to purple, Brabant turned suddenly to his officer.

"Come below, Pedro, I want to talk to you."

The Chileno followed him in silence, and the two men remained conversing in almost whispered tones for some time.

"Tell me," asked the Chileno, fixing his dark eyes on the captain's face; "when did you first begin to suspect?"

"From the very first day that I saw her and

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Danvers together. He betrayed himself—fool that he is—by being too formally polite to her, before me.”

“ And then you read this letter of his to her. How did you get hold of it ? ”

“ I was coming back from my bathe in Totoga Creek about six in the morning. Went into Manton's for a few minutes' rest and a smoke. Danvers's door was open, and though he was not in the room, I could hear his voice talking to Manton. I stepped inside to sit down and wait for him. He had been writing a letter, which was but half finished. It was to my wife, and began, ' My darling Helen. ' ”

“ Ah-h-h ! ” said Diaz, in a savage, hissing whisper.

“ I left it there, strolled out into the dining-room where Manton and Danvers were having their morning coffee. I joined them, and chatted with them for half an hour. Then I went home, and told Minea what to do when the letter came. It was delivered by Danvers's native servant. Minea met him at the garden gate. He asked if I was in. She said I was out ; he gave her the letter, and told her to

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give it to her mistress, who was still in bed. The girl brought it to me to where I was waiting. I opened it, took a copy of it, and gave it back to her to give to her mistress."

He paused, and then smiled grimly at the Chileno. Then he smoked on in silence.

"You will kill them both?" asked Diaz.

"I don't think so, Pedro. I must wait. And you will stand to me?"

The officer's hand met his in a steady grip.

"That is all for the present, Pedro. She—and he, too—thinks that the *Loelia* will not be back in Levuka for three months. But we shall be here in less than a month. And if I find that Danvers has gone to Sydney in the monthly steamer, then I shall know how to act," and he tapped the copy of the letter that was in his breast pocket.

Then Pedro told him the real cause of the quarrel between Dr. Bruce and Danvers. Brabant heard him with an unmoved face. "I thought as much," he said briefly.

A few days later, the *Loelia*, instead of laying northwards for the Line Islands, was at anchor

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in Apia Harbour in Samoa, and Brabant, leaving the vessel in charge of his mate, paid a round of visits to several of his old friends in various parts of the island. At the end of three weeks he returned on board as calm as usual, and told Diaz to heave up anchor. By sunset that evening the *Loelia* was sailing between the islands of Savaii and Manono, and heading due west for Fiji before the strong south-east trade wind. Just four weeks from the date of her departure she re-entered Levuka harbour, and the first news that Brabant heard was that the *Eagle*, the monthly steamer to Sydney, had sailed a few days previously, and that among her passengers was Captain Danvers, who had "been called to Melbourne on matters connected with his business," but would be returning in a couple of months. He had left a letter for Brabant, in which, after speaking of company matters, he said: "I do hope I shall have the pleasure of seeing Mrs. Brabant in Sydney before she leaves. I daresay I can get her address from your agents there."

As he was reading his letters Bruce came on board.

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"You are back sooner than you thought, Brabant."

"Yes. When I got to Samoa I met a German brig bound to the Line Islands, and arranged with her captain to see all my traders for me, as the *Loelia* is as leaky as a basket. I'm going to give her a good overhaul here."

There were of course the usual sneering comments made by the local female gossips on Captain Danvers's sudden departure for Sydney, so soon after Mrs. Brabant had left in the *Maritana*. If Brabant knew of them he took no heed. He went about his work as usual, met his friends, and attended to the *Loelia's* repairs in his methodical manner.

Eight weeks passed by, and then the *Eagle*, a slow-crawling old ex-collier, which did duty as a mail and passenger steamer, entered the port, and Danvers, jauntier and handsomer than ever, stepped ashore and took up his old quarters at Manton's Hotel. Here he soon learnt the reason of Brabant's early return, and in less than an hour he was up at the bungalow, and seated opposite Nell Brabant's husband, whom he had found reading his letters.

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"I met Mrs. Brabant quite a number of times," he said effusively ; " she was looking very well, but I think was getting tired of Sydney when I last saw her. Said that she thought that Fiji after all was the best place, you know."

Brabant nodded. " Just so. Well, we'll see her before another couple of months, I hope."

"I hope so," said Danvers genially, as he raised his glass of brandy-and-soda and nodded "good luck" to his host.

"I was thinking, Danvers," said Brabant, as he laid down unopened the rest of his letters, " that it would be just as well if you came round with me in the *Loelia* and saw my stations in the New Hebrides. It would facilitate matters a good deal, and the cutter is all ready for sea. In anticipation of your coming I have fitted up your quarters on board."

"Delighted, my dear fellow. When do you propose sailing?"

"As soon as ever you like."

"To-morrow, then. I'm anxious to get this matter pulled through. As you will see by

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your letters from my people, they are prepared to pay ten thousand down at once, and fifteen thousand in three bills, at one, two, and three years."

"That is all right. Shall you be ready to-morrow, then?"

"Quite."

After Danvers had gone to his hotel Brabant went on board the *Loelia*, and he and Pedro Diaz again talked together.

At nine o'clock next morning the cutter *Loelia* weighed anchor, and made sail for "a cruise among the New Hebrides. With Captain Brabant" (so said the tiny weekly newspaper published in Levuka) "was Captain Harold Danvers, who is making a tour of inspection of the captain's properties before taking possession of them on behalf of the new Trading Company."

Forty-eight hours after leaving Levuka the cutter was clear of the land, and leaping and spinning before the trade wind which was blowing lustily. Danvers, as he sat in a deck-

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chair smoking a cigar, took a lazy interest in the crew, who were all natives of the Line Islands—short, square-built, half-naked savages, with jet-black hair and huge pendulous earlobes filled with coiled-up leaves. There were but eight of them—the *Loelia* was a vessel of ninety tons—and Diaz was the only white man on board except Brabant and Danvers.

It was four o'clock in the afternoon. A native seaman struck eight bells and Brabant came on deck. Pedro was standing aft beside the helmsman.

“We're going along at a jolly good pace, are we not——” began Danvers. Then his voice failed him suddenly, and his face turned white as he saw that Brabant was looking at him with the deadliest hatred in his eyes.

“What is the matter with you, Brabant? Why do you——”

Brabant raised his hand, and Pedro came and stood beside him, and then two of the wild-looking crew suddenly sprang upon Danvers, seized him by the arms, and handcuffed him.

“Away with him below,” said Brabant, turning on his heel and walking aft.

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Too utterly astounded to offer any resistance, Danvers was hurried along the deck to the main hatch and made to descend. The hold was empty, but an armed native was there awaiting the prisoner.

Diaz followed him below.

"You are to make no noise, nor speak to the sentry," he said, with a sullen savageness; "if you do I shall put on the hatches."

Danvers was no coward, but his heart sank within him. "Is this a joke, or has Captain Brabant gone mad?"

The Chileno looked at him with blazing eyes, and half raised his hand as if to strike. Then, without a word, he turned away and went on deck.

Brabant was seated on the skylight with an outspread chart before him.

"Keep her S.S.W., Pedro. We are steering for Hunter's Island. Set the squaresail."

For five days the *Loelia* steered steadily before the trade wind, till one morning there lay before her a huge, treeless cone, whose barren, rugged sides rose blackly from the sea.

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Not a vestige of vegetation was visible anywhere from the cutter, and from the summit of the cone, and from long, gaping fissures in the sides, ascended thin, wavering clouds of dull, sulphurous smoke. Here and there were small bays, whose shores showed narrow beaches of black sand, upon which the surf thundered and clamoured unceasingly. Not even a wandering sea-bird was to be seen, and the only sound that disturbed the dread silence of the place was the roar of the breakers mingling with the muffled groanings and heavings of the still struggling and mighty forces of Nature in the heart of the island—forces which, ninety-five years before, had found a vent and destroyed every living thing, man and beast, in one dreadful outburst of flame, whose awful reflection was seen a hundred leagues away.

It was a place of horror and desolation, set in a lonely sea, appalling in appearance to the human eye.

But at one point on the western side, as the *Loelia* crept in under the lee, there opened out a small bay less than fifty fathoms in width

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from head to head, where, instead of the roaring surf which beat so fiercely against the rest of the island, as if it sought to burst in its rocky walls and extinguish for ever the raging fires hidden deep down in its heart, there was but a gentle swell which broke softly upon a beach less dismal to the eye than the others. For instead of the black volcanic sand the shore was strewn with rough boulders of rock, whose sides were covered in places with a thick, green creeper. Above, the sides of the mountain showed here and there a scanty foliage, low, stunted, and dull tinted ; and in the centre of the beach a tiny stream of fresh water trickled through sand and rock and mingled itself with the sea.

Abreast of this spot the cutter's jib-sheet was hauled to windward. Then the boat was lowered and filled with provisions in cases and casks, and Diaz, with four hands, went ashore and carried everything up beyond high water-mark. Brabant watched them unconcernedly from the ship.

The boat returned and Diaz came on deck, and looked at the captain expectantly.

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Brabant made a gesture towards the main hatch, then stepped for'ard. Diaz, with two seamen, descended the hold. In two minutes they reappeared with Danvers, who, the moment he came on deck, looked wildly about him.

“For God's sake, listen to me!” he said hoarsely to the Chileno. “Are you, too, and these men, as mad as your captain, or am I mad myself? Where is he? Let me see him. What are you doing with me?”

No answer was made. The native sailors seized him by the arms and dragged him to the side. Then he was lowered into the boat, which at once pushed off and was headed towards the land. He looked, with horror in his eyes, at the dreadful aspect before him, then turned his face towards the cutter. Brabant was leaning on the rail watching him.

The five grim, silent men landed him on the beach, and Diaz pointed without a word to the pile of stores, and then, grasping his steer-oar, motioned to his crew to push off.

“You devils! You fiends incarnate! Are you going to leave me here to die alone in this

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awful place?" cried Danvers, as with clenched and uplifted hands he saw Diaz swing the boat's head seaward.

The Chileno turned his face slowly towards him.

"You shall not die alone, Señor Danvers. You shall have company—good company."

CHAPTER IV

ONE evening Captain Lester of the *Mari-tana*, then lying in Sydney harbour "awaiting orders," called on Mrs. Brabant at the Royal Hotel.

"I have just received this from Captain Brabant, madam," he said with studied, but cold politeness, as he handed her a letter.

She took it with an impatient gesture. "A letter to you and none to me! Surely he must have written, and the letter has miscarried."

"No doubt, madam," replied the captain of the *Maritana* in the same stiff tones.

Mrs. Brabant motioned him to a seat as she read the letter, first telling Minea, the Samoan maid, who was present, to leave the room. The girl obeyed, and as she passed Lester she gave him such a curious but friendly glance, that now for the first time he began to have a

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suspicion that she was not false to her master. Then, too, it suddenly flashed across his mind that according to Samoan custom, unknown to her mistress, Minea was a "sister" to Brabant, who had exchanged names with her father, a minor chief of a good family, on whose land Brabant had settled when he first came to Samoa. That alone, he knew, would ensure the girl's unswerving loyalty and devotion to her "brother"—she could not conceal from him anything that affected his honour or reputation.

"She'll tell him," he thought, as he watched Mrs. Brabant read the letter; "thank God I shall be spared the task."

Brabant's letter to Lester was very short. It was dated from Vavau, Friendly Islands, and was as follows :—

"DEAR LESTER,—I send you this hurried note by the Tongan Government schooner *Taufaahau*. I am here in the *Loelia*, inspecting my stations in connection with their transference to Captain Danvers's company. He is very anxious to realise his ideal, and I do not wish to keep him waiting. If Mrs. Brabant is not

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in Sydney when this reaches you, please communicate with her as quickly as possible. No doubt she will be quite anxious to return to Fiji now, and I shall be here awaiting the *Maritana*. I hope to see you within three weeks after you receive this. Make the *Mari-tana* sail for all she is worth.

“Yours sincerely,

“JOHN BRABANT.”

She handed him the letter. “Thank you, Captain Lester. When do you propose sailing?”

“I am ready for sea now, madam. I only await your pleasure.”

He did not look at her as he spoke, for he feared that the hatred and contempt with which he regarded her would show itself in his face.

“I can come on board to-morrow. Will that do?” she asked.

“Certainly, madam, if it will not hurry you too much.”

“Not at all, Captain; I am sick of Sydney, and am only too glad to come on board the *Maritana* again.” She spoke with a friendly

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warmth, but Lester's distantly polite manner gave her no encouragement.

"Will you not stay and dine with me?" she asked, with a smile; "do say yes. I feel quite angry that my husband has not written to me. I am really a deserted wife. Don't you think so, Captain Lester?"

Her forced pleasantry was thrown away.

"I am very sorry, Mrs. Brabant, but as we are to sail to-morrow, I must hasten on board at once. There are many matters to which I must attend."

He rose and bowed stiffly, and Nell Brabant extended her hand. He touched it, and in another moment was gone. She sank back in her chair with a white face and terror in her eyes. What did he mean by his cold and distant manner? Did he suspect anything? Did he know anything? How could he? Minea alone knew that she had left Sydney for a month with Danvers, and Minea would not betray her! What need to fear anything?

Then, satisfied with her own powers of intrigue, she smiled to herself, and dismissed

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Lester's cold face and unresponsive manner from her mind.

When Lester went on board again he took from his pocket a second letter from Brabant, which was marked "Private and Confidential," and with a puzzled brow read it over again. "I want you, Lester, to attend carefully to my instructions. *You are to consider my other letter as cancelled.* I wish you, instead of coming to Tonga, to make all possible haste to 22 10' S. and 170 25' E. I shall meet you there or thereabouts in the *Loelia*.—Yours sincerely. J. B."

"What does all this mystery mean, I wonder?" he muttered, as he looked at an outspread chart on the table; "why should he pick upon the vicinity of such a God-forsaken spot as Hunter's Island for a rendezvous? But it's none of my business." Then he turned in and slept.

Sunset in the South Seas.

The *Loelia* was lazily head-reaching towards Hunter's Island, about six miles distant, its grim and rugged outlines showing out clearly

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under the yellow streaks of the sinking sun. Pedro Diaz was on deck, drinking his coffee, when the native seaman who was on the lookout cried—

“Sail ho, sir! Away there on the weather beam.”

Diaz stepped below to Brabant, who was lying in his bunk reading a book.

“Here she is, sir.”

“Ah! three days sooner than I expected her, Pedro. You know what to do, don't you? Here is the letter for Lester. Get away as quickly as you can. The night will be fine and clear, and there will be no need to hoist a light for you.”

He handed the officer a letter addressed to “Captain James Lester, schooner *Maritana*,” and then rose and began to dress himself.

In a few minutes the cutter's boat, with Pedro Diaz and four hands, was pulling towards the *Maritana*, which was coming along under a six-knot breeze. The moment the boat left the side Brabant set the gaff topsail and square-sail, and headed the *Loelia* towards the north end of the island. Just as she disappeared

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from the view of those on board the approaching vessel, Pedro Diaz came within hailing distance. He stood up.

“*Maritana* ahoy!”

Lester's voice replied to his hail, the schooner was brought to the wind, the boat ranged alongside, and Diaz ascended.

“How are you, Lester?” he said, shaking hands with his friend. “I have no time to talk. Read this letter at once, and let me get away with all speed.”

Lester was impressed with the emphatic manner in which he spoke, and without a single question opened Brabant's letter. Then an exclamation of astonishment burst from him.

“What does it all mean, Pedro? I——”

The Chileno waved his hand impatiently, and shrugged his shoulders. “We must obey orders, Lester.”

“Of course. I shall let Mrs. Brabant know at once.” Then he read the letter a second time.

“DEAR LESTER,—Please ask Mrs. Brabant to get together some of her luggage as quickly as possible, and come on board the *Loelia*, which is the better vessel of the two as far as comfort

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goes. Minea can remain on board the *Maritana*. You will find further orders awaiting you at Levuka."

That was all. Lester stepped below, and found his passenger seated at the cabin table.

"That vessel is the *Loelia*, madam, and Diaz has just come aboard with this letter ;" and he handed it to her.

"What an extraordinary thing ! Why did not my husband come for me himself if he is so anxious for me to join him on the *Loelia*. Is she close-to ?"

"Yes, but not in sight. I think Captain Brabant was afraid of the wind failing, and the cutter drifting in on the weather side of the island, for he has gone round to the lee side."

Calling Minea, Mrs. Brabant hurriedly packed some necessary clothing, telling the girl the reason for such haste, and in a few minutes she sent word on deck that she was ready. Diaz was already in the boat, steer-oar in hand, and talking to Lester, who was leaning over the rail, wondering why his former comrade seemed so embarrassed, and impatient to get away.

Mrs. Brabant held out her hand. "Good-

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bye, Captain Lester. I hope you will have a quick passage to Levuka. Goodbye, Minea."

She descended the ladder into the boat, and took her seat. Diaz lifted his hat, and then gave the word to push off.

"Good-bye, Pedro," said Lester.

The Chileno looked up.

"Good-bye, Jim, old comrade."

The men stretched to their oars, and the whaleboat shot out towards the dark shadow of the island as the crew of the *Maritana* went to the braces, the yards swung round, and she stood away to the eastward, and Lester, with a strange feeling of unrest oppressing him, leant with folded arms upon the rail, and wondered why Pedro Diaz had given such a tone of sadness to his last words.

The night was clear with the light of myriad stars, as the boat swept through the gently heaving sea. Diaz, standing grim and sombre-faced at the steer-oar, had not spoken a word since the boat left the ship. His eyes looked straight ahead.

Mrs. Brabant had never liked the dark,

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sullen-faced Chilian, but now there came into her heart such a sudden, horrible feeling of loneliness that she felt she would be glad to hear him speak.

“Is my husband quite well, Mr. Diaz?”

“Quite well, madam,” he replied, still staring straight before him.

His voice appalled her, and she made no further effort to break the dreadful silence as she looked at the black bulk of the island, along whose fissured sides there every now and then ran ragged sheets of smoky flame. The boat rounded the island, and then when opposite the little bay, Diaz swung her head round, and headed directly for the shore.

“Are we landing here?” asked the woman in a faint, terrified voice.

“Yes.”

The boat touched the shore, the crew jumped out, carried Mrs. Brabant's two boxes to the beach, placed a lighted boat-lantern on one, and then Diaz silently held out his hand to assist her on shore.

She stepped out, and then stood facing him for a moment, her cheek showing the pallor of deadly fear. Then the seaman thrust his hand

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in the breast of his coat, and handed her a letter. In another instant, without a word of farewell, he had leapt into the boat again, which at once pushed off—and she was alone.

When daylight broke it revealed two figures on the lonely beach—one a woman, who lay prone upon the ground, and wept in silent anguish, and the other a man, whose frightful aspect made him look scarcely human. He was kneeling beside one of the boxes, glaring with the eyes of one almost mad with horror at a letter he had taken from the woman's hand when he discovered her lying unconscious.

“I have known everything from the very first. Danvers said in one of his letters to you that life with you would be happiness unutterable, even in a desert place. I have brought you here to meet him. He has waited long.

“JOHN BRABANT.”

And never again were Danvers and Nell Brabant seen by men, and John Brabant and the *Loelia* and her crew were supposed to have been lost at sea.

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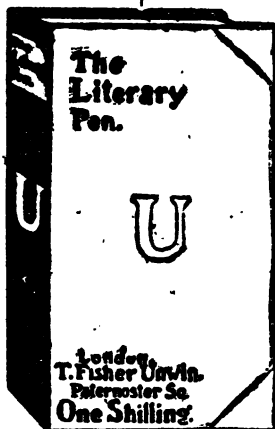
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